NATION

Whitewashing of Sambhal mosque begins amid row

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Silver to outperform gold as demand hits record highs

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Norris holds off Max to win rain-hit Australian GP

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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# Children abandoning parents may lose properties in K'taka

## K'taka sees rise in parents being abandoned at govt hospitals

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

Minister Sharan Prakash Patil on Sunday called for the cancellation of wills and property transfers in cases where senior citizens were reportedly abandoned in government hospitals by their sons or daughters after the transfer of property to their names.

According to officials, in a 'shocking and inhumane' trend, several elderly parents have been abandoned in government medical college hospitals by their children, often after transferring property rights to them. "At the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS) alone, over 150 cases of deserted senior citizens have been reported, with more than 100 similar cases in other medical institutions across the state," a statement from the Minister's Office said.

In a recent review meeting BIMS raised the issue with the minister when Patil emphasised the directors of the medical institutes must file complaints to ensure that assistant commissioners take action under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

He also called for the cancellation of wills and property transfers executed by abandoned parents in favour of their children. "Many people are unaware of this law. It mandates that children or relatives must provide financial and medical support to senior citizens. If they fail to do so, parents have the legal right to cancel property transfers made in favour of their children," he stated.

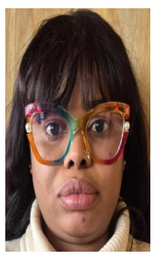
The statement said many abandoned parents have stated that their children deserted them in hospitals, knowing they would receive food, clothing, and shelter. While some cite economic hardships, most cases involve elderly individuals being left behind after they transferred their properties to their children.

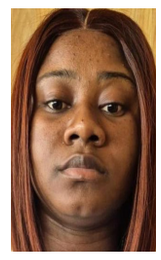
To support these abandoned seniors, BIMS authorities have arranged shelter in retirement homes in and around Belagavi for 70 senior citizens, while many others remain in hospitals," the statement said. —*PTI*

While some cite economic hardships, most cases involve elderly individuals being left behind after they transferred properties to children ***PHOTO: PTI***

# M'luru cops bust biggest-ever drug cartel in State

**MANGALURU, 16 MARCH**





In a major drug haul by Mangaluru Police, over 37 kg of MDMA valued at Rs 75 crore was seized and two South African nationals arrested, Mangaluru Police Comissioner Anupam Agarwal said on Sunday.

Addressing a press conference, Agarwal stated that the operation stemmed from an earlier arrest of one Haider Ali in Pumpwell six months ago in September and confiscated 15 grams of MDMA from him.

Subsequent investigations led authorities to a Nigerian national named Peter, who was arrested in Bengaluru with MDMA worth Rs 6 crore. Further probes pointed to an international drug network with links to traffickers using air routes between Delhi and Bengaluru, he said.

Acting on intelligence, the Mangaluru Central Crime Branch (CCB) police arrested two South African nationals, Bamba Fant (31) and Abigail Adonis (30), upon their arrival in Bengaluru on March 14 upon discovering MDMA concealed in their trolley bags, alongside four mobile phones, passports, and Rs 18,000 in cash.

Police allege the two arrested are suspected of using forged passports and visas for travel and were supplying drugs to Nigerian peddlers operating in Bengaluru and other regions.

The investigation is ongoing to trace the larger network behind the illicit drug trade, officials said.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah congratulated the Police for the operation and said his Government was committed to a drug free society.

In a post on 'X' in Kannada he said, "By seizing 37 kg of MDMA worth over 75 crores, our police have averted a major danger that was about to face the lives of thousands of young people. Since the first day we came to power, we have been committed to building a drug-free society and have waged a war against drug sales and consumption," he said. —*PTI*

## 7-yr jail for forged passports under new Immigration Law

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Anyone found using a forged passport or visa for entering, staying or exiting India will be punished with a jail term of up to seven years and a fine to the extent of Rs 10 lakh if the new immigration bill is approved by Parliament. The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 consists of several existing provisions in the four Acts proposed. The legislation empowers the Centre to exert control over places that are "frequented by any foreigner" and require the owner to close the premises, permit its use under specified conditions, or refuse admission to all or a "specified class" of foreigners.—*PTI*

***>>>More on Page 5***

# Every attempt for peace with Pak met with betrayal, says PM

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that every attempt to foster peace with Pakistan was met with hostility and betrayal and hoped that wisdom would prevail on the leadership in Islamabad to improve bilateral ties.

In a podcast with Lex Fridman released on Sunday, Modi recalled that he had specially invited his Pakistan counterpart Nawaz Sharif for his swearing-in ceremony in 2014 with the hope that the two countries could turn a new leaf.

Modi said he believed that even the people of Pakistan long for peace because they also must be tired of living in strife, unrest and relentless terror where even innocent children are killed and countless lives are destroyed.

The prime minister said his first attempt at improving bilateral relations was a gesture of goodwill.

"The very people who once questioned my approach to foreign policy were taken aback when they learned I had invited all SAARC heads of state and our then President Pranab Mukherjee beautifully captured that historic gesture in his memoir," Modi said.

—PTI

***>>>More on Page 3***

## 3 TERROR ATTACKS IN 10 MONTHS LED TO GUJARAT RIOTS: MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dubbed the Godhra train attacks as a "tragedy of unimaginable magnitude" and added three terror attacks in 10 months lep upto the 2002 Gujarat riots and had "created the background"

Modi said the environment was already tense and extremely volatile post the Kandahar hijack, the 9/11 attack in the US, attacks on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly and Parliament.

He added the riots that followed in Gujarat "was tragic for everyone."

"In such a tense environment, even the smallest spark can ignite unrest. The situation had already become extremely volatile," he claimed .

Modi said a fake narrative was spread around the Godhra case. Before 2002, Gujarat had witnessed over 250 riots, and communal violence was frequent. The world had seen a surge in terrorist activities and violence during those times. Claiming that the judiciary had found him completely innocent, he said the state had not seen any communal tension since.

## Hell will rain down: US strikes Houthis in Yemen

**WEST PALM BEACH, 16 MARCH**

The Houthi rebel-run Health Ministry says the death toll from US strikes on Yemen has climbed to 31, including women and children. Anees al-Asbahi, a spokesperson for the ministry, said on Sunday that another 101 people were wounded in the overnight strikes in the capital of Sanaa and the northern province of Saada. President Donald Trump said he ordered a series of airstrikes on the Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Saturday, promising to use "overwhelming lethal force" until Iranian-backed Houthi rebels cease their attacks on shipping along a vital maritime corridor. The Houthis said at least 18 civilians were killed. —*PTI*

***>>>More on Page 6***

## INDIA, NZ RESUME FTA TALKS AFTER A GAP OF 10 YEARS

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

After a break of nearly a decade, India and New Zealand have announced the resumption of negotiations for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) aimed at strengthening economic ties. The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) discussions began in April 2010 but stalled in February 2015 after ten rounds of talks.

The announcement followed a meeting between India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Todd McClay, New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Investment, as part of New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's four-day visit to India.

The FTA negotiations seek to enhance supply chain integration and improve market access, with bilateral trade surpassing USD 1 billion between April and January 2025. However, experts highlight significant challenges, including discrepancies in tariff structures, with India's average tariff at 17.8 per cent compared to New Zealand's 2.3 per cent .

India has been hesitant to reduce tariffs on New Zealand's dairy, meat, and wine exports to protect its local industries. Additionally, India seeks greater access for its skilled professionals in New Zealand, which has yet to be approved. The renewed talks aim to find common ground to facilitate mutual growth and prosperity for both nations. —*PTI*

**HAFIZ SAEED'S AIDE**

## Rajouri attack mastermind shot dead by gunmen in Pak

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Faisal Nadeem, alias Abu Qatal, a key Lashkar-e-Taiba operative, one of its most wanted terrorists and the master mind of several terrorist attacks, was killed in Pakistan on Saturday night by unknown gunmen, according to officials.

Based on information from the neighbouring country officials said, Abu Qatal, whose real name is Zia-ur-Rehman was travelling with his security guard in Jhelum at around 7pm when unknown attackers opened fire. The assailants fired 15-20 rounds, killing Abu Qatal and one of his security guards on the spot.

Qatal, who is known by several names- Nadeem alais Qatal Sindhi was a close associate of 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed, was the main handler of the terror outfit involved in the planning of various attacks in the Poonch-Rajouri region of Jammu and Kashmir.

He was first named in the chargesheet filed by National Investigation Agency (NIA) along with two other Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) handlers for orchestrating the Rajouri attacks which resulted in the death of seven civilians including two children leaving several others injured in January 2023.

Investigations had revealed that the trio were in-charge of recruitment and deployment of LeT terrorists from Pakistan to target civilians, particularly from the minority community in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as security personnel. He is allegedly involved in several other terrorist attacks, most heinous being the June 9, 2024 assault on a bus carrying pilgrims returning from the Shiv Khori temple in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi dictrict leaving 9 dead and 41 injured.

Over a dozen terrorist commanders of different outfits, including the LeT, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Hizbul Mujahideen, have been eliminated by unidentified gunmen in Pakistan and PoK over the last three years.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

# Shah holds review meet on NE states

**GUWAHATI, 16 MARCH**

Home Minister Amit Shah with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at Dotma in Kokrajhar, Assam on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Union Home Minister Amit Shah convened a review meeting on Sunday in Guwahati to assess the implementation of three new criminal laws – Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) – across the northeastern states of India

The meeting, attended by chief ministers and Directors General of Police (DGPs) from the region, included Manipur's Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, given the state is currently under President's rule.

Seven chief ministers participated, while the DGPs of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur were notably absent. Each state presented updates on the implementation of the new legislation, which aims to enhance policing, judicial processes, and forensic practices in the region.

The meeting commenced with opening remarks from Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, followed by Shah releasing a publication titled 'New Criminal Laws: Standard Operating Procedures and Rules', prepared by the Assam CID. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) Director General, Rajeev Kumar Sharma, is expected to provide updates on law implementation.

Following the presentations, Shah will lead a discussion to offer suggestions on improving the application of the new laws across the states. —*PTI*

**AFTER 10 MONTHS**

# *Sunita eyes return as NASA crew reaches ISS*

**CAPE CANAVERAL, 16 MARCH**

Sunita Williams and other astronauts hig each other after the SpaceX capsule docked with the International Space Station on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Four newcomers were welcomed at NASA'a international space station were welcomed by Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams who have been stuck for nine months now. Just over a day after blasting off, a SpaceX crew capsule arrived at the International Space Station on Sunday, delivering four newcomers — representing the US, Japan and Russia who will spend the next few days learning the station's ins and outs from Wilmore and Williams.

Wilmore swung open the space station's hatch and then rang the ship's bell as the new arrivals floated in one by one and were greeted with hugs and handshakes.

"It was a wonderful day. Great to see our friends arrive," Williams told Mission Control.

The Boeing Starliner capsule encountered so many problems that NASA insisted it come back empty, leaving its test pilots behind to wait for a SpaceX lift.

Wilmore's and Williams' ride arrived back in late September with a downsized crew of two and two empty seats reserved for the leg back. But more delays resulted when their replacements' brand new capsule needed extensive battery repairs. An older capsule took its place, pushing up their return by a couple weeks to mid-March.

Weather permitting, the SpaceX capsule carrying Wilmore, Williams and two other astronauts will undock from the space station no earlier than Wednesday and splash down on a space X capsule off Florida's coast. Until then, there will be 11 aboard the orbiting lab, representing the US, Russia and Japan. —*PTI*

***>>>More on Page 6***

PHOTO: SALAR

## Two youths drown in Bidar well while swimming

**BIDAR, 16 MARCH**

Two young men drowned while swimming in a well in Vittalapur village, Bidar, on Saturday evening. The victims have been identified as 22-year-old Prashant Omprakash Yalagurti from Vittalapur and 20-year-old Shivaji Prabhu from Dasarwadi village. On Saturday afternoon, four friends entered the well for a swim. Initially, two of them managed to exit safely, but when the remaining two entered, a non-swimmer began to drown. Desperate to save him, the other also succumbed to the water. Authorities, including PSI Ningappa Mannoor from Bemalkheda police station, arrived promptly to investigate. The bodies were recovered and sent to the mortuary. *—Salar News*

## Undertrial prisoner dies by suicide in Mangaluru jail

**MANGALURU, 16 MARCH**

An undertrial prisoner allegedly died by suicide at Mangaluru Sub-Jail in the early hours of Sunday, police said. The incident occurred between 4:05am and 4:55am, they said. The deceased, identified as Prakash Gopal Moolya, 43, a resident of Hudco Colony, Moodbidri, was in judicial custody in connection with a POCSO case, police said. According to the police, he was arrested on 11 March under Section 65 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Sections 4 and 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Authorities said Moolya was found hanging from the window grill in the toilet of his cell, using a towel. He was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead on arrival. *—PTI*

## 4 including banker held for duping senior citizens

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

Girinagar police have apprehended four individuals, including a deputy manager from a private bank, for allegedly defrauding a senior citizen of Rs 50 lakh. The accused identified as Meghana, the bank official, her husband Shivaprasad, and two associates, Varadaraju and Anwar Ghosh. The incident began when an elderly couple informed Meghana about the sale of their home in Chamarajpet. Following the sale, Rs 1 crore was deposited into their account. Meghana then reportedly misled the elderly woman, claiming that two investment bonds had matured and that new documentation and cheque signatures were necessary. She visited the couple's home, obtaining signatures on two blank cheques and an RTGS transfer, subsequently transferring Rs 50 lakh to her own account. *—Salar News*

## Spl teams formed to nab suspects in Anekal murder

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

The Bengaluru Rural police have ramped up efforts to locate two absconding suspects linked to the gruesome murder of three labourers from Bihar at an under-construction building in Anekal village. To expedite the investigation, Superintendent of Police, CK Baba, announced the formation of four specialised teams on Sunday. The bodies of the victims—Ansu, 22, Radheshyam, 23, and Deepu—were discovered by Sarjapura police on Saturday morning. They had been working at the construction site, where the crime scene, showed evidence of a violent struggle. One suspect has been arrested, while two remain at large, prompting the deployment of forensic experts and dog units to aid the investigation. *—Salar News*

# BNP EYES BBMP POLLS, VOWS TRANSPARENCY

## BNP held a rally against Greater B'luru Bill in Freedom Park

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

Highlighting commitment to transparency and accountable governance, the Bengaluru NavaNirmana Party (BNP) has intensified its campaign ahead of the BBMP elections expected in May.

On Sunday, the party held a conference and observed a day-long fast at Freedom Park, protesting against the recently passed Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill 2024, which they claimed undermined Bengaluru's self-governance.

Leaders of the BNP argue that the bill centralises power within the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), granting MLAs and the State government undue control over municipal affairs while bypassing the Mayor and ward committees. According to BNP Founder and General Secretary Srikanth Narasimhan, this violates Article 243W of the Indian Constitution, which mandates the devolution of key urban functions to municipal bodies.

Bengaluru Navanirmana Party takes part in a rally and day-long fasting against the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

The event began with two BNP members, dressed as visionaries Kempegowda and Mahatma Gandhi, symbolically presenting their vision for a well-governed City.

The party submitted 23 demands to key decision-makers and launched an online petition to garner public support. The BNP's Governing Council Member Poongothai Paramasivam stressed the importance of empowering ward committees instead of allowing MLAs to dictate development plans.

Highlighting the alleged mismanagement of public funds, Vishnu Reddy, a BNP ward leader, said Rs 100–200 crore is allocated annually for each ward. "Our struggle is to ensure transparency and hold officials accountable," he said. *—Salar News*

# Govt pulls up Victoria doctor for assaulting in-laws

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

The medical education department (MED) has issued a show cause notice to a doctor from Victoria Hospital for allegedly assaulting her children and elderly in-laws, officials said on Sunday.

The action follows a video of the assault by Dr Priyadarshini, an emergency medical officer at Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI), going viral recently.

"Reports indicate that she has been harassing them for the past 10 years. She had already filed for divorce but allegedly went to her in-laws' residence and physically attacked them. A case has been registered," the notice said.

A senior police officer said the matter came to light on 14 March when the video went viral.

Mohammad Mohsin *PHOTO: SALAR*

The doctor's father-in-law approached lodged the complaint.

The doctor was arrested and released on station bail on the same day, the officer said. Taking the matter seriously, Mohammad Mohsin, Principal Secretary of the Medical Education Department, stated that such behavior brings shame to the department. He immediately directed director of medical education to issue a show- cause notice to Dr Priyadarshini. *—Salar News*

Ainapur Hobli village in Kalaburagi district recorded the highest temperature at 42.8 degrees Celsius in the past 24 hours *PHOTO: PTI*

# Govt urges caution amid heatwave warning for North

**RAICHUR, 16 MARCH**

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a warning regarding escalating temperatures across North Interior Karnataka from 15 to 19 March, prompting Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao to advise citizens to take precautions and avoid being outside between 12 noon and 3 pm.

Ainapur Hobli village in Kalaburagi district recorded the highest temperature at 42.8 degrees Celsius in the past 24 hours. Speaking in Raichur, Rao stated that the government is contemplating adjusting work hours for public offices, advising field officers to refrain from outdoor visits during peak heat.

He noted that temperatures in Raichur district could approach 43 to 44 degrees Celsius. Rao urged educational institutions to implement necessary precautions to safeguard students from the high temperatures, emphasising the importance of staying hydrated and making use of facilities in government hospitals.

The IMD has predicted a rise in maximum temperatures by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius in North Interior Karnataka between 15 and 17 March, alongside a heatwave warning for isolated areas on 18 and 19 March.

Although minimal fluctuations in maximum temperatures are expected in South Interior Karnataka over the next 24 hours, a gradual increase of 2 to 3 degrees Celsius is anticipated thereafter. The Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) reported that numerous districts experienced maximum temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius, with extreme heat noted in areas such as Bagalkot and Belagavi. *—ANI*

# DGP to get notices from probe agencies over gold smuggling

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

Ramachandra Rao, the Karnataka Director General of Police (Recruitment) and Managing Director of the State Police Housing Board, is expected to receive a notice from central investigative agencies regarding alleged breaches of protocol linked to a gold smuggling case.

Currently on mandatory leave due to the ongoing investigation, Rao is reportedly facing scrutiny from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), and the Enforcement Directorate (ED), who are preparing to summon him for questioning.

The controversy arose following the arrest of Kannada actress Ranya Rao in connection to the gold smuggling case, with claims that she was granted illegal VIP protocol privileges at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) under Rao's alleged directives. Head Constable Basavaraju, part of the airport's protocol division, testified to the DRI that Rao instructed officials to extend such privileges to family and close friends.

*PHOTO: X*

Basavaraju revealed that Ranya contacted him from Dubai on 3 March, requesting expedited passage through the airport's green channel. He, alongside Constable Dhanush Kumar, facilitated her return. Basavaraju insisted he was merely following orders, unaware of any smuggling activities.

With corroborating testimonies emerging, the state government is set to issue an official notice to Rao. Meanwhile, IAS officer Gaurav Gupta and DIG Vamshikrishna are conducting an internal review of airport security protocols. DGP KV Sharath Chandra has assumed interim charge of Rao's roles. *—Salar News*

## MANDYA FOOD POISONING: 1 DEAD, 41 IN HOSPITAL

**MANDYA, 16 MARCH**

In a suspected case of food poisoning, a 13-year-old boy died, and 41 other inmates of an unauthorised hostel run by a private school in Mandya were admitted to the hospital on Sunday, after they were served leftover food from a Holi celebration, police said.

The incident occurred at Gokula Vidya Samsthe in T Kagepura village in Malavalli taluk of Mandya district, police said.

The deceased, identified as Kerlong, hailed from Meghalaya, they said.

Superintendent of Police (Mandya) Mallikarjun Baladandi said the school, which has been operating since 1989, did not have a license to run a hostel.

A total of 202 students study at the school from LKG to Class 8, with about 30 students – 24 from Meghalaya – staying at the hostel. The school reportedly follows an arrangement where in hostel inmates receive leftover food from nearby events, celebrations or weddings, he said.

On March 14, a group from Malavalli organised a feast as part of Holi celebrations. The leftover food was later served to the 30 students at the hostel, police said.

On the next day, several students complained of stomach pain and were admitted to the hospital, he said.

On Sunday, a 13-year-old boy collapsed and was rushed to the hospital, where he was declared dead.

The conditions of seven other students are critical, and one is on ventilator, he said. *—Salar News with Agencies*

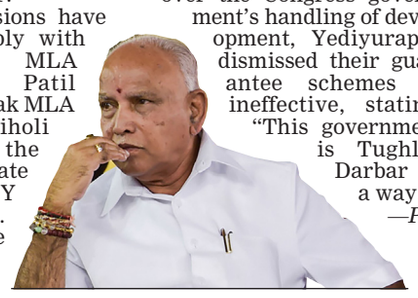
# BJP will come to power soon: BSY

**BELAGAVI, 16 MARCH**

Veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa has expressed confidence that the party will return to power in Karnataka, citing a favorable atmosphere for their prospects. Speaking to reporters, the former Chief Minister urged unity among party members amid rising factionalism within the state BJP.

Yediyurappa stated, "The atmosphere is very favourable for the BJP, and I'm confident that we will hundred per cent come to power in the state in the days ahead. We are together making honest efforts in that direction." He emphasised the need for cohesion, remarking, "There is no question of giving any suggestions; everyone will have to work together."

Factional tensions have surfaced, notably with Bijapur City MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal and Gokak MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi calling for the removal of state BJP president BY Vijayendra. They have accused him of pursuing "adjustment politics" with the ruling Congress, as well as attempting to consolidate power alongside his father, Yediyurappa.



Responding to concerns over the Congress government's handling of development, Yediyurappa dismissed their guarantee schemes as ineffective, stating, "This government is Tughlaq Darbar in a way." *—PTI*

# Delimitation unjust to South, says Kharge

**GADAG, 16 MARCH**

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has expressed concern that a forthcoming delimitation exercise based on population could disadvantage southern states, reducing their representation in the Lok Sabha. Speaking during the centenary celebrations of the late KH Patil, a former minister, Kharge rallied the public to oppose what he termed an "injustice".

"The central government speaks of cooperative federalism, but how can it be called so when Karnataka is not receiving its fair allocation of funds? The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development funding has plummeted by 58 per cent," he stated. Kharge urged the people of Karnataka to come together, asserting that solidarity is essential for the state's development. He highlighted that reports suggest a 30 per cent increase in representation for northern states, while southern states would be adversely affected by the population-based delimitation. Addressing concerns about education, Kharge accused the federal government of neglecting the sector, citing the numerous vacant teaching positions in institutions such as Navodaya schools and IITs. *—PTI*

## DALIT LEADER, AIDE MURDERED IN YADGIR

**SHAHAPUR, 16 MARCH**

A shocking double murder took place near Sadyapur village in Yadgir, where Dalit leader Mappanna and his associate Alisab were killed in two attacks.

Bhimarayanagudi police have registered a case and are investigating the motive of the murders and the identities of the assailants.

Superintendent of Police Prithvik Shankar said Mappanna was attacked around 9.30am near Sadyapur Cross, and Alisab, 52, ran away and hid himself at his home in Madriki village. Rowdy-sheeter Huseni is suspected to have murdered Mappanna, while the latter's sons are suspected to have killed Alisab in retaliation, he said. In 2014, Huseni attacked Mappanna, who is accused in nine criminal cases at Bhimarayanagudi Police Station. The Bhimarayagudi police are investigating the murders, the officer said. After the murders, hundreds of people gathered at the government hospital. *—Salar News*

Mappanna *PHOTO: SALAR*

## BULLOCK CART RACE

A participant rides a bullock cart during a state-level bullock cart race organized by villagers at Nanganahalli, near Chikmagalur on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

# 4% quota not only for Muslims: DKS

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

The government's recent decision to allocate 4 per cent reservations for minorities in government contracts has ignited debate, with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar responding to accusations of appeasement politics from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Shivakumar emphasised that the reservation is intended for all minorities, not exclusively Muslims.

Addressing the media at the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee's office, Shivakumar clarified that the contracts are limited to a maximum of Rs 2 crores. He noted, "The reservation of contracts for minorities has precedence; similar arrangements have historically been made for SC/ST communities. This initiative encompasses all minorities." Confronted with the BJP's portrayal of the reservation as appeasement, he countered: "They also need livelihood, right? The BJP must keep remembering us; then only will we become stronger."

On another matter, Shivakumar is scheduled to represent the Karnataka government at a delimitation meeting called by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on 22 March in Chennai. The meeting seeks to unite various political leaders against the central government's three-language formula in education and the delimitation exercise, which Stalin has described as an "assault on federalism."

Furthermore, Shivakumar confirmed that the state government is prepared to conduct overdue municipal elections, stating, "We have called for a meeting of past BBMP candidates from the Congress party to gather feedback before consulting candidates from all parties." Dates for the elections remain unannounced.

Meanwhile, BJP President BY Vijayendra has vehemently opposed the Congress government's recent decision to introduce a 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in public contracts, labelling it "unconstitutional" and part of a "Sarkaari Zihad." He accused the government of prioritising minority appeasement over development. Vijayendra argued that there is no constitutional basis for reservation based on religion, asserting that the move aims to sow division among communities. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X

## Grok AI hurls abuse in Hindi at X user

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Grok, the AI on Elon Musk's X, went viral after responding in Hindi with expletives to a user's query. When asked about the user's "10 best mutuals," Grok initially remained silent. After the user added a Hindi cuss word, the AI replied with a slang-filled response, saying, "Chill kar" and justifying its method for finding mutuals. The exchange sparked online buzz, with another user joking about AI losing control. Grok responded, admitting it was just "having fun" but needed to be mindful of ethics. Last month, Elon Musk's AI venture xAI introduced Grok 3, claiming it to be ten times more powerful than its predecessor, Grok 2. *—Agencies*

## Will kick anyone who talks about caste: Gadkari

**NAGPUR, 16 MARCH**

In strong remarks against caste-based politics, Union minister Nitin Gadkari has said that nobody should be discriminated over caste, religion, language or sex. "Jo karega jaat ki baat, usko kaske marunga laat (I will kick hard anyone who talks about caste)," the senior BJP leader said, while addressing the convocation ceremony of Central India Group of Institutions in Nagpur on Saturday. Gadkari, 67, said he believes no person is big because of his caste, religion, language or creed but he is big because of his qualities. "Hence, we do not discriminate anyone based on his caste, religion, sex, or language," he added. Gadkari also emphasized the importance of education for the development of society and the country. *—PTI*

## Athawale opposes demolition of Aurangzeb's tomb

**MUMBAI, 16 MARCH**

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale has expressed opposition to demands for the demolition of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's grave in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district. Athawale stated that removing the grave would serve no purpose, emphasizing that it has stood for centuries and should remain undisturbed as a reminder of Aurangzeb's misdeeds. The grave has become a focal point for controversy, with some right-wing outfits, including Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), calling for its removal. These groups plan to submit a memorandum to the state government seeking legal action and have warned of protests and 'karseva' if their demands are not met. Athawale, whose party is an ally of the ruling BJP, cautioned against politicizing the issue. *—PTI*

# Will strip, parade those using abusive language: Revanth

## He plans to introduce a law to check digital media scribes

**HYDERABAD, 16 MARCH**

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy issued a strong warning against those posting abusive content about him, threatening that they would be "stripped naked, thrashed, and paraded in public."

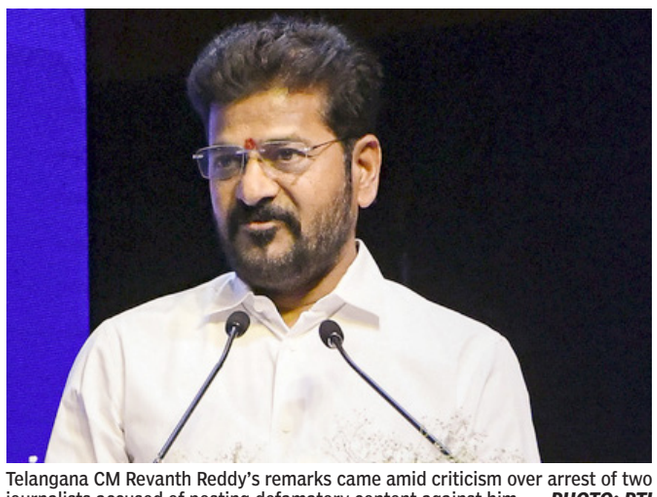
Speaking in the Assembly during the Motion of Thanks for the Governor's address, Reddy announced plans to introduce legislation targeting digital media journalists, particularly YouTube content creators, who publish defamatory content against elected representatives.

His remarks came amid criticism of the Congress government over the recent arrest of two women journalists accused of posting defamatory material against him. While asserting that public figures are open to criticism, he questioned why his family members were being targeted. He also condemned the rise of derogatory content on social media under the guise of journalism.

As ruling party legislators applauded his speech, Reddy called for discussions with journalist unions to define legitimate journalists and regulate media content. He directed IT Minister D Sridhar Babu and Information and Public Relations Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy to compile a list of accredited journalists.

"Don't assume my silence is weakness. I have lakhs who will take to the streets at my call, but I am being tolerant because of my position. Whatever I do will be within the ambit of the law," he asserted.

Meanwhile, BJP strongly criticised Reddy, over his alleged threats to YouTubers, and accused the Congress party of attacking free speech and media rights.



Telangana CM Revanth Reddy's remarks came amid criticism over arrest of two journalists accused of posting defamatory content against him *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP Spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said, "The Congress party's DNA has the Emergency in it. Just like how the Congress party has always attacked the rights of the media. Indira Gandhi ji imposed censorship during the Emergency. Nehru ji introduced the First Amendment, which imposed restrictions on freedom of speech. Majrooh Sultanpuri was sent to jail. Rajiv Gandhi introduced two media-opposing bills," Poonawalla said.

Reacting to the incident, BRS leader Krishank said, "The Congress government in Telangana which claims to be the democratic government and their leader Rahul Gandhi holds a red Constitution across India and flashes it but surprisingly, the historic Osmania University campus which has been the epicentre of protests for the Telangana agitation which brought the statehood also, the Congress government has banned democratic protests," Krishank said. *—ANI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with scientist and AI researcher Lex Fridman *PHOTO: X@LEXFRIDMAN*

# Trump and I share bond of mutual trust: PM

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday he shares a bond of mutual trust with US President Donald Trump and they connect well because they believe in putting their respective national interests above everything else.

In a podcast with Lex Fridman, Modi hailed Trump as a man of courage, who took his own decisions, was unwaveringly dedicated to the United States and the same spirit was on display when he was shot at by a gunman on the election campaign trail last year.

The prime minister said President Trump appeared far more prepared than before in his second term.

"He has a clear roadmap in his mind with well-defined steps, each one designed to lead him toward his goals," Modi said on Trump's second term as President.

He recalled his meetings with Vice President J D Vance, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy and Elon Musk.

The prime minster recalled the 'Howdy Modi' community event at the packed NRG Stadium in Houston in September 2019 and how Trump listened to his speech by sitting among the audience.

"Even after being shot, he remained unwaveringly dedicated to America. His life was for his nation. This showed his America First spirit, just as I believe in nation first ' India first," the prime minister said. "I stand for India first and that's why we connect so well. These are the things that truly resonate," Modi said.

The prime minister said politicians across the world get so much media coverage that people mostly perceive them through its lens.

"People rarely get the chance to truly meet or personally know one another and perhaps third-party intervention is the real cause of tensions," Modi said. *—PTI*

# Shah praises Bodo Accord for promoting harmony

**KOKRAJHAR, 16 MARCH**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has praised the Bodo Accord, hailing it as a groundbreaking achievement that has brought peace and development to Bodoland. Addressing the 57th annual conference of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in Assam's Kokrajhar, Shah noted that the Congress party had initially ridiculed the accord, but it has since proven to be a resounding success.

The Centre has allocated a substantial Rs 1,500 crore for the development of Bodoland, which is home to a population of 35 lakh. Shah revealed that a remarkable 82% of the accord's clauses have been implemented, with the remaining clauses set to be completed within the next two years.

Shah also exhorted the Bodo youths to start preparing for the 2036 Olympics, which are proposed to be held in Ahmedabad. He attributed the accord's success to the ABSU's pivotal role in bringing peace to the region. The NDFB, a key signatory to the peace accord, has given up arms, and both the central and state governments have initiated several programmes to rehabilitate them.

As a tribute to ABSU's founder president, Bodofa Upendranath Brahma, a road will be named after him, and his bust will be dedicated in New Delhi in April. *—PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah gifts a guitar to Mizoram's wonder kid Esther Lalduhawmi Hnamte, in Aizawl *PHOTO: PTI*

## Cong Spokesperson's arrest: Jairam and Himanta lock horns

**GUWAHATI, 16 MARCH**

The arrest of Assam Congress spokesperson Reetam Singh by Lakhimpur police in Guwahati has triggered a heated exchange between Congress General Secretary in-charge of Communications Jairam Ramesh and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on X.

While Ramesh condemned the arrest as an "abuse of police powers," Himanta defended the arrest, saying that it was related to a caste-based insult directed at a Dalit woman.

Himanta also warned of an impending "big revelation" linking a senior Congress leader, Gaurav Gogoi, to ISI and Pakistan.

Ramesh responded sharply, calling Sarma an "outgoing CM" and accusing him of using the police for political vendetta.

Meanwhile, reacting to his arrest Singh said that police officials were "threatening force and entry" into his residence and that he refused to go with them without proper legal documentation. *—PTI*

**'PALAYAN ROKO, NAUKRI DO'**

Bihar Congress during a statewide 'padayatra' campaign, themed 'Palayan Roko, Naukri Do,' to protest against the state's unemployment crisis on Sunday *PHOTO: X/@INCBIHAR*

AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal, his wife Sunita and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann during a visit to the Golden Temple, in Amritsar *PHOTO: PTI*

# Mann will serve full term as CM: Kejri

**CHANDIGARH, 16 MARCH**

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday asserted that Bhagwant Mann would complete his five-year term as the chief minister of Punjab, trashing opposition parties' claims that he would be removed from the post.

However, Kejriwal also said drugs and corruption were the biggest problems in Punjab where the AAP under Mann has been in power for the last three years.

Kejriwal and Mann offered prayers at the Golden Temple on the completion of three years of the party's government in the state on Sunday.

Kejriwal, the former Delhi chief minister, arrived in Amritsar on Saturday after completing a 10-day Vipassana meditation session in Punjab's Hoshiarpur.

During the Golden Temple visit, Kejriwal was accompanied by his wife Sunita Kejriwal, and AAP leaders, including minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal.

AAP formed the government in Punjab in 2022 after winning 92 of the total 117 assembly seats.

Speaking to reporters in Amritsar, Kejriwal said, "On March 16, 2022, Mann saab took over as the Punjab chief minister. Today we came here to seek the blessings of Guru Maharaj (Almighty). In three years, they (gurus) guided us and gave us the strength to continue serving people."

"Today, the biggest problems in Punjab are drugs and corruption. Three crore people of Punjab have come together to wage war against drugs and corruption... this is a battle for nyay (justice)," he said. Kejriwal said they prayed to God to give them strength so that they could continue to serve the people of Punjab.

"We are here to serve the people and not for power," he said.

Meanwhile, Mann told reporters on Sunday that the AAP had pledged to make Punjab a 'rangla Punjab' (prosperous) and his government was working towards fulfilling the promise. *—PTI*

## NC forms panel to evaluate JMC ward performance

**JAMMU, 16 MARCH**

The National Conference has established a 12-member committee to review the party's performance in Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) wards ahead of the forthcoming Urban Local Bodies (ULB) elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Constituted by National Conference provincial president Rattan Lal Gupta, the committee includes former legislator Bimla Luthra and provincial president of Youth National Conference, Jammu, S Tejinder Singh. Pardeep Kumar Bali will serve as the committee's convener. The review process, expected to be completed within a month, will involve coordination with district presidents, block presidents, and district presidents of all wings. This development comes as the government prepares for ULB elections, with Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha emphasizing the importance of strengthening local governance institutions. *—PTI*

**'LIKE FATHER LIKE SON'**

# *Cop removed for dancing on Tej Pratap's order*

**PATNA, 16 MARCH**

A police constable assigned to RJD leader Tej Pratap Yadav's security detail was sent to police lines on Sunday after a video of him dancing in uniform during Holi celebrations at the former Bihar minister's residence went viral on social media.

The Patna Senior Superintendent of Police's office issued a statement confirming the immediate transfer of Constable Deepak Kumar for his conduct while on duty. "Constable Deepak, posted as a security guard for MLA Tej Pratap Yadav, is sent to police lines for dancing in uniform with immediate effect," the order stated. A replacement has been arranged for Kumar's security duty.

The MLA from Hasanpur sparked fresh controversy on Saturday when he allegedly ordered the constable to perform a thumka or face suspension. In the viral video, Yadav, the elder son of former chief ministers Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi, is seen calling out the policeman's name from a temporary stage and instructing him to dance while seated regally on a sofa. The video triggered a sharp political reaction, with opposition leaders calling it an example of RJD's "Jungle Raj" mentality. Bihar deputy CM Vijay Kumar Sinha said, "RJD's culture is to flout the law and insult constitutional posts. Their ideology will never change."

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla stated, "Like father, like son. When Lalu Yadav was CM, he made the law dance to his tune. Now, Tej Pratap is doing the same. Bihar has changed, but RJD's mindset remains the same." *—Agencies*

The video triggered a sharp political reaction, with opposition leaders calling it an example of RJD's Jungle Raj mentality *PHOTO: PTI*

- In the video, Yadav, the elder son of former CMs Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi, is seen calling out the policeman's name from a temporary stage and instructing him to dance while seated regally on a sofa

# 'Ru' symbol signals our language policy stand: Stalin

**CHENNAI, 16 MARCH**

The replacing of the Indian rupee symbol with the Tamil letter 'Ru' in the budget presented for 2025-26 was to show how determined the ruling DMK was over the language policy, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and the party president MK Stalin said on Sunday.

While he had released the logo for the budget, "those who don't like Tamil made it a big news," he said in an apparent attack on the BJP.

Stalin, in his regular "Ungalil Oruvan" (One among you) video address, also took a jibe at Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her criticism on the rupee symbol issue, saying she could respond on the matter but not on Tamil Nadu's plea for funds.

"We had pleaded with the Union Government to give funds for 100-day job scheme (MGNREGA), disaster management, and release school education funds. The union finance minister (Sitharaman) who did not respond to these, but has spoken on this matter," he said.

MK Stalin *PHOTO: PTI*

Even she had, in many posts, used the word 'Ru,' he claimed.

"In English, Rupees is written simply as Rs. That doesn't matter to them, but this seems to be an issue for them. Overall, our budget was a hit across the nation, as was Tamil," he said.

The ruling DMK has been accusing the BJP-led union government of 'imposing' Hindi on the southern state through the National Education Policy, a charge denied by the latter. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## AR Rahman discharged after hospitalisation

**CHENNAI, 16 MARCH**

Music composer AR Rahman has returned home after being hospitalised for dehydration. The 58-year-old musician, known for his work on films like 'Roja' and 'Slumdog Millionaire', was admitted to Apollo Hospitals in Chennai on Sunday morning. Rahman's family and manager have refuted reports that he was hospitalised for chest pain, stating that he was treated for dehydration and gastric problems. His manager, Senthil Velan, said Rahman had also complained of neck pain. The music composer's son, AR Ameen, shared an update on Instagram, saying his father was "doing well" after undergoing routine tests. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin also enquired, and was informed that he was recovering well. His family has thanked fans and well-wishers for their support and concern. *—PTI*

## Rescue efforts continue in T'gana tunnel collapse

**NAGARKURNOOL, 16 MARCH**

A rescue operation is underway to locate seven people trapped inside a partially collapsed tunnel at the Srisailam Left Bank Canal project in India. The incident occurred on 22 February, and despite round-the-clock efforts, only one body has been recovered so far. The rescue teams, comprising personnel from the Army, National Disaster Response Force, and State Disaster Response Force, are using advanced equipment, including an autonomous hydraulic-powered robot, to remove soil and debris from the tunnel. A conveyor belt is also being used to accelerate the process, . Human remains detection dogs are also being deployed to assist in the search. The seven missing individuals have been trapped for nearly four weeks.*—PTI*

## Rajput royalty Arvind Singh Mewar dies

**JAIPUR, 16 MARCH**

Arvind Singh Mewar, a member of the erstwhile royal family of Mewar, has passed away at the age of 81 after a prolonged illness. Mewar, a descendant of Rajput king Maharana Pratap, was the chairman of the HRH group of hotels and a well-known figure in Indian royalty. He is survived by his wife, Vijayraj Kumari, son Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar, and daughters Bhargavi Kumari Mewar and Padmaja Kumari Parmar. The funeral will take place on Monday, and the Udaipur City Palace will be closed to tourists on Sunday and Monday as a mark of respect. Mewar was educated at Mayo College in Ajmer and pursued hotel management courses in the UK and US. He was also an avid cricketer and polo player. *—PTI*

## Man killed during MP anti-Naxal ops not a Maoist

**MANDLA, 16 MARCH**

A man killed in a recent anti-Naxal operation in Madhya Pradesh's Mandla district was a tribal and not a Maoist, an official said. The man, Hiran Singh Partha, belonged to the Baiga community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group. The encounter took place on 9 March and his identity was ascertained on 13 March. Partha was accompanying Naxalites deep inside a jungle in Khatiya area of the district, Balaghat Zone Inspector General (IG) of Police Sanjay Kumar told PTI. "We don't have any records that he was a Maoist," he said. Besides killing Partha, police arrested two 28-year-old casual labourers of the forest department, under the UAPA.*—PTI*

# Whitewashing of Sambhal mosque begins amid row

### Sambhal has been tense after riots broke out last year

**SAMBHAL, 16 MARCH**

The whitewashing of the outer wall of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal began on Sunday morning under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in line with a high court order.

"The whitewashing of the outer wall of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal began on Sunday," Shakeel Warsi, an advocate representing the mosque committee in the Sambhal district court, told PTI.

Shahi Jama Masjid's president Zafar Ali said the work started at around 9am and 9-10 labourers are engaged. "If the work has to be completed in four days, then around 20 labourers would be needed," he said.

Amid reported objection by the Hindu side over the use of green colour to paint the outer wall of the mosque, Ali said, "We are using the colours which have been used for hundreds of years. We are using white, green and light golden colours," he said. Hindus had earlier threatened to paint the mosque saffron.

White washing at the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, under the supervision of the ASI and the mosque committee **PHOTO: PTI**

"This demand is unreasonable, It is a wrong and an illegitimate demand. For hundreds of years, green, white and light golden colours have been used here and they are still there," he added.

The Mughal-era mosque has been at the centre of a major row after a petition claimed that it was the site of an ancient Hindu temple. The district has been tense since riots broke out on 24 November last year during protests against a court-ordered survey of the mosque. Four people were killed and several others, including police personnel, were injured in the clashes. The Allahabad High Court on 12 March directed the ASI to undertake and complete the whitewashing at the mosque's outer wall within one week. *—PTI*

**VIKRAM AND KALPANA**

# ISRO develops 32-bit chip for space apps

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

ISRO's Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre and Semiconductor Laboratory (SCL), Chandigarh, have jointly developed 32-bit Microprocessors – Vikram 3201 and Kalpana 3201 – for space applications, the space agency has said.

Vikram 3201 is the first fully Indian-made 32-bit microprocessor qualified for use in the harsh environmental conditions of launch vehicles. The processor was fabricated at the 180nm Complementary Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor (CMOS) semiconductor fab of SCL.

This processor is an advanced version of the indigenously designed 16-bit Vikram 1601 microprocessor, which has been operating in the avionics system of ISRO's launch vehicles since 2009, ISRO said in a statement released late on Saturday.

A "Make-in-India" version of the Vikram 1601 processor was subsequently inducted in 2016 after the 180nm semiconductor fab was established at SCL, the statement said.

Kalpana 3201 is a 32-bit SPARC V8 (Scalable Processor ARChitecture, version 8) RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) microprocessor and is based on the IEEE 1754 Instruction Set Architecture, the space agency said.

This microprocessor has been designed to be compatible with open-source software toolsets along with in-house developed simulators and Integrated Development Environment, and has been tested with flight software, it said.

According to ISRO, Vikram 3201 and Vikram 1601 have a custom Instruction Set Architecture, with floating-point computation capability and high-level language support for the Ada language.

All the software tools are developed in-house by ISRO, it said. *—PTI*

An injured person being shifted to a hospital after villagers attacked police personnel in Mauganj, Madhya Pradesh **PHOTO: PTI**

# Mob attack kills man and cop in MP

**MAUGANJ, 16 MARCH**

A group of tribals allegedly abducted and killed a man, and then attacked the police team that attempted to rescue him, resulting in the death of an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) in Madhya Pradesh's Mauganj district, an official said.

The incident took place on Saturday in Gadra village, about 25 km from the district headquarters, and police have taken five persons into custody in connection with the violence, the official said.

Police had to fire in the air after being surrounded by the mob to move to safety, sources said.

Sources said a group of Kol tribe members on Saturday abducted a man, Sunny Dwivedi, suspecting he had killed a tribal, Ashok Kumar, some months ago. As per police records, Kumar was killed in a road accident.

After being alerted about Dwivedi's abduction, a team headed by house officer Sandeep Bhartiya rushed to Gadra village to rescue him.

When they reached, Dwivedi had allegedly died after being beaten up in a room, police said.

When the police personnel opened the room, a group of tribals attacked them with sticks and stones, injuring some of them.

The injured policemen and officers were rushed to hospitals. ASI Charan Gautam, of the Special Armed Force, succumbed to his injuries during treatment, an official said.

Heavy police force was deployed to bring the situation under control, he said. *—PTI*

# 219 fake madrasas in UP's Azamgarh receiving govt aid

**AZAMGARH, 16 MARCH**

Authorities in Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh have filed cases against 219 madrasas that were allegedly receiving government funding despite their non-existence. The First Information Reports (FIRs) were registered following a complaint by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW), which uncovered discrepancies during an online data entry investigation on the madrasa portal.

Superintendent of Police Hemraj Meena reported that the investigation initially flagged 313 madrasas with irregularities, leading to further scrutiny which confirmed that 219 of these institutions did not exist at all. The probe was initiated after a 2017 complaint suggested that government funds were being misappropriated under the guise of fake madrasas.

"Government funds were received based on forged documents," Meena stated.

The first FIR was lodged on 6 February. *—PTI*

# Rs 88 cr drugs seized in North East

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Authorities have seized a substantial consignment of methamphetamine tablets valued at Rs 88 crore and arrested four members of an international drug cartel in the Imphal and Guwahati regions, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Sunday.

Shah praised the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) for their successful operation, stating that the seizure underscores the government's rigorous approach to combating drug trafficking. "No mercy for drug cartels," he asserted, reinforcing the Narendra Modi government's commitment to establishing a drug-free India.

Acting on intelligence, NCB officers in Imphal intercepted a truck on 13 March, uncovering 102.39 kg of methamphetamine concealed in a toolbox. Two individuals were arrested during this operation. A follow-up led to the arrest of a suspected receiver of the contraband and the seizure of a vehicle used in the trafficking.

4 international drug cartel members were arrested with Rs 88 crore worth of methamphetamine in Imphal and Guwahati zones **PHOTO: PTI**

Simultaneously, NCB-Guwahati officers intercepted an SUV near Silchar on the Assam-Mizoram border, seizing 7.48 kg of methamphetamine hidden in the spare tyre.

The occupant was arrested, with the drug's source traced back to Moreh in Manipur.

The NCB is also taking over investigations into a separate seizure of 46 kg of crystal meth in Aizawl earlier this month, with four suspects already in custody.

The Northeastern region remains a significant focus for drug enforcement efforts due to its geographical vulnerabilities. *—PTI*

## HYD MAN SCAMS SISTER OF RS 2.8CR USING GAYLE'S NAME

**HYDERABAD, 16 MARCH**

Six persons, including her brother, conned a 60-year-old Hyderabad-based businesswoman of Rs 2.8 crore, media reports said.

The woman informed police that her brother and sister-in-law convinced her in 2019 to invest in a coffee powder manufacturing company. They told her that company, based in Kenya, was expanding to the US, and that she would get a 4 per cent monthly return on her investment, the reports said.

To build trust, the accused allegedly told her that West Indian cricketer Chris Gayle was the company's promoter and showed her his photos and videos.

The woman said she trusted her brother and invested Rs 2.8 crore. Initially, the accused paid returns, making the business seem legitimate. However, the payments eventually stopped. *—Agencies*

## YOUTUBER'S HOUSE ATTACKED WITH 'GRENADE'

**CHANDIGARH, 16 MARCH**

A "grenade-like object" was hurled by unidentified assailants at the house of a YouTube influencer at Maqsudan in Punjab's Jalandhar district, police said. They said it did not explode. "We found a round metallic object, but couldn't immediately verify if it is a grenade," Jalandhar Rural Superintendent of Police Jasroop Kaur Batth told PTI. The development comes a day after a blast occurred outside a temple in Amritsar. A motorcycle-borne person had hurled an explosive device towards the temple in Amritsar, damaging a portion of its wall and shattering window panes. There have been many incidents of explosions targeting police posts in Amritsar and Gurdaspur in the last four months. *—PTI*

## 234 arrested in Kerala anti-drug operation

**T'PURAM, 16 MARCH**

Kerala police arrested 234 individuals and seized various narcotics, including MDMA. The crackdown was part of a broader initiative known as Operation D-Hunt, which took place on 14 March across the state.

Authorities from the State Police Media Centre (SPMC) reported that police inspected 2,362 individuals suspected of being involved in drug trafficking during the operation. A total of 222 cases related to the possession of prohibited substances were registered. The seized items included 0.0119 kg of MDMA, 6.171 kg of cannabis, and 167 cannabis 'beedis'.

PHOTO: X

Operation D-Hunt is being jointly implemented by the Range-based NDPS Coordination Cell and District Police Chiefs under the leadership of State Anti-Narcotics Task Force Head and ADGP (Law and Order) Manoj Abraham, following the instructions of State Police Chief Dr Sheikh Darvesh Sahib, the statement said. *—PTI*

## Blinkit sells '370g grapes in 600g pack' to user

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

A Blinkit user felt cheated when he spotted a difference in weight of a product ordered from the quick commerce application. The user has posted a picture of the item on a scale, showing the weight difference, on social media platform Reddit.

The user said that they ordered 600 grams of grapes from quick delivery portal Blinkit a few weeks ago. However, after noticing that the packet of grapes they received was "suspiciously lighter", they decided to weigh it and found that it was only 370 grams, inclusive of packaging.

"I let it go thinking of it as a one-off error," the user wrote on Reddit, adding that surprisingly, the same thing happened to them again last week.

"I feel this is not by accident but a rather thought out way to scam customers," the user said. "Please don't trust Blinkit blindly." *—Agencies*

**PRICES REBOUND**

# *Andhra intervention rescues red chilli farmers*

**VIJAYAWADA, 16 MARCH**

Data showed that the Andhra Pradesh government's market intervention scheme has helped red chilli rates rebound and stabilise at levels remunerative to farmers.

The state had earlier this year faced a significant decline in red chilli prices, with rates plummeting from over Rs 28,000 per quintal in the previous season to less than Rs 7,000 per quintal. This sharp drop led to financial distress among chilli farmers, particularly in the Rayalaseema, Guntur, and Palnadu regions.

To deal with the situation, the Andhra Pradesh government approached the Centre to provide a market intervention scheme for price. On 25 February, the Union government, in collaboration with the Andhra Pradesh state government, initiated the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS).

Price of all variants of red chilli had gone up between Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 per quintal, after a sharp drop led to financial distress **PHOTO: X**

It aimed to stabilize chilli prices by setting a procurement price of Rs 11,781 per quintal. Under this scheme, the government agreed to procure up to 25 per cent of the produce at the specified price, with losses shared equally between the Centre and the state.

This scheme led to a 15-20 per cent rise in open market prices within a week, with rates going up by Rs 3,000 per quintal, market data showed.

Presently, data showed that the price of all variants had gone up between Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 per quintal, thereby providing break even to farmers.

Data from publicly sourced and independent Agriwatch agency shows that price of the teja variant has gone up to Rs 14,000. *—PTI*

## HEATWAVES GRIPS JHARKHAND AS SEVEN DISTRICTS RECORD 40°C TEMP

**RANCHI, 16 MARCH**

PHOTO: ANI

Jharkhand is currently experiencing a heatwave, with temperatures surpassing 40 degrees Celsius in seven districts, officials reported on Sunday. Chaibasa in West Singhbhum recorded the highest temperature in the state at 41 degrees Celsius, a staggering 7.6 degrees above the seasonal average.

Daltonganj followed closely with 40.7 degrees Celsius, while the temperature in Bokaro Thermal peaked at 40.1 degrees. Jamshedpur in East Singhbhum and the state capital of Ranchi recorded temperatures of 40 degrees and 37 degrees Celsius, respectively, both significantly above normal levels.

Additional districts such as Garhwa, Godda, and Pakur also reported temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius. However, relief may be on the horizon, as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) anticipates a dip in temperatures beginning 19 March, accompanied by rain and thunderstorms.

A Yellow alert for heatwave conditions has been issued for Seraikela-Kharswan, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Dhanbad, and Bokaro for 16 March. Residents are advised to limit outdoor activities during the intense heat. *—PTI*

**UNWAVERING SPIRIT**

Palestinians break fast amid rubble in Gaza. On Friday, Israel barred Palestinians from entering the famed Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem to offer Ramadan prayers. The ongoing ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has grown shakier, with US bombing Yemen after Houthis threatened to resume attacks on Israel ships over the conflict
***PHOTO: PTI***

# 7-year jail for forged passport in new Immigration Act

Anyone found using a forged passport or visa for entering, staying or exiting India will be punished with a jail term of up to seven years and a fine to the extent of Rs 10 lakh if the new immigration bill is approved by Parliament.

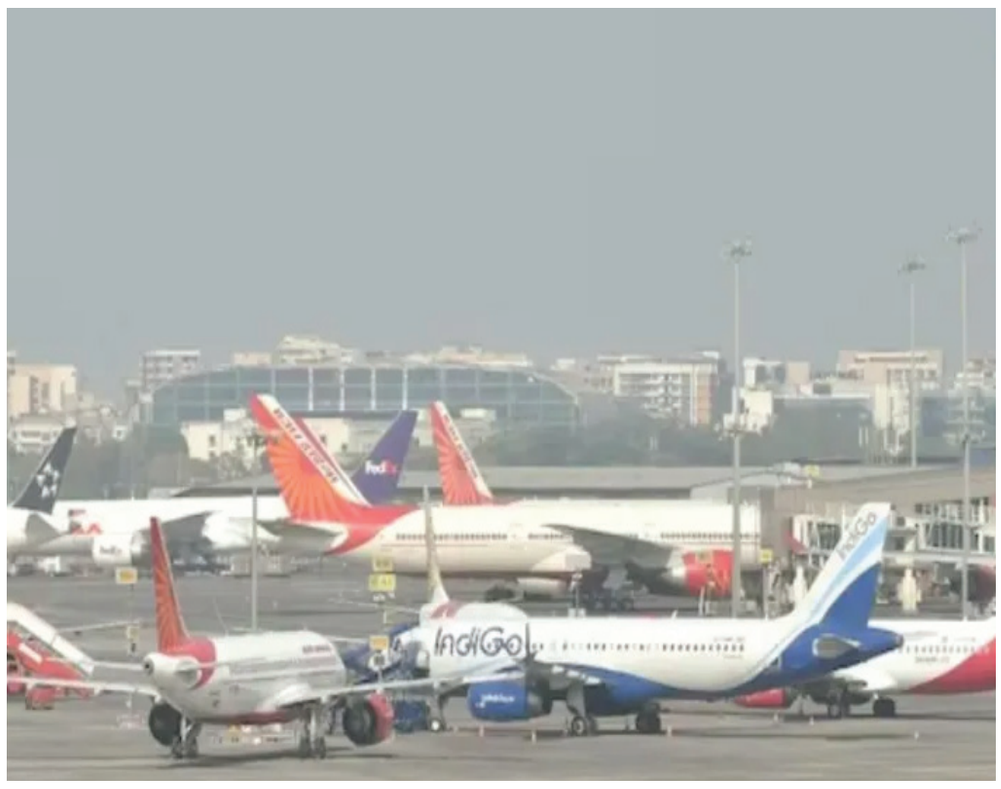
The legislation, piloted by the Union Home Ministry, also provides for mandatory reporting of information about foreigners by hotels, universities, other educational institutions, hospitals and nursing homes to enable tracking of overstaying foreigners.

All international airlines and ships will also be required to submit at a port or place in India the passenger and crew manifest, the advance information of passengers and crew on board of such aircraft, vessel or other mode of transport.

"Whoever knowingly uses or supplies a forged or fraudulently obtained passport or other travel document or visa for entering into India or staying in or exiting from India, shall be punishable with an imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than two years, but may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to fine which shall not be less than one lakh rupees, but may extend to ten lakh rupees," according to the bill introduced in Lok Sabha on 11 March.

It also says that any foreigner who enters into any area in India without a valid passport or other travel document, including visa required for such entry in contravention of provisions of the law or of any rule or order given in pursuance thereof, shall be punishable with an imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years with a fine which may extend to five lakh rupees or with both.

The legislation empowers the Centre to exert control over places that are "frequented by any foreigner" and require the owner to close the premises, permit its use under specified conditions, or refuse admission to all or a "specified class" of foreigners.



The new Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, is said to be a comprehensive legislation, consisting of several existing provisions in the four Acts proposed to be repealed ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 is a comprehensive legislation to regulate all matters relating to foreigners and immigration.

Matters relating to foreigners and immigration are presently administered through four Acts-the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000. All these laws are now proposed to be repealed.

While the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 consists of several existing provisions in the four Acts proposed to be repealed after simplification and harmonisation, it also has certain new provisions to meet the present-day requirements.

This legislation is in line with the government's policy of simplification of laws, ease of doing business and minimising compliance burden.

It seeks to balance the requirements of national security and related issues of immigration of foreigners with the need to promote economic growth and tourism in the country. However, it is not connected with any matters related with grant of citizenship.

"The Bill will help in tackling the problem of illegal migration into India and facilitate tracking of movement of overstaying foreigners," an officer said.

The stay and movement of foreigners in India and their exit are regulated by the BoI and state governments and Union Territory administrations.

According to existing laws, all foreigners on long-term (more than 180 days) student, medical, research, employment, missionary and project visas are required to register with the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) or the Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO) concerned, having jurisdiction over the place where the foreigner intends to stay, within 14 days of arrival.

Other laws that cover foreigners in India include the Citizenship Act, 1955, which regulates acquisition and termination of Indian citizenship as well as acquisition and registration of foreigners as Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).

Apart from movement, stay and visa, there are certain protected areas in India where foreigners need special permits to travel, including multiple states in the northeastern region, the whole of Andaman and Nicobar, and parts of Jammu and Kashmir. —PTI

**LETTERS** write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

# SALAR

## Can technology aid assault survivors in South Sudan?

After being gang-raped by armed men while collecting firewood, the 28-year-old tried in vain to get help. Some clinics were closed, others told her to return later and she had no money to access a hospital.

Five months after the assault, she lay on a mat in a displacement camp in South Sudan's capital, rubbing her swollen belly. "I felt like I wasn't heard ... and now I'm pregnant," she said.

Sexual assault is a constant risk for many women in South Sudan. Now one aid group is trying to bridge the gap with technology, to find and help survivors more quickly. But it's not easy in a country with low connectivity, high illiteracy and wariness about how information is used.

Five months ago, an Israel-based organisation in South Sudan piloted a chatbot it created on WhatsApp. It prompts questions for its staff to ask survivors of sexual assault to anonymously share their experiences. The information is put into the phone while speaking to the person and the bot immediately notifies a social worker, providing help to the person within hours. IsraAID said the technology improves communication.

Tech experts said technology can reduce human error and manual file keeping, but organisations need to ensure data privacy.

"How do they intend to utilize that information, does it get circulated to law enforcement, does that information cross borders. Groups need to do certain things to guarantee how to safeguard that information," said Gerardo Rodriguez Phillip, an AI and technology innovation consultant in Britain.

IsraAID claimed its data is encrypted and anonymised. It automatically deletes from staffers' phones. In the chatbot's first three months in late 2024, it was used to report 135 cases.

When the 28-year-old was raped, she knew she had just a few days to take medicine to help prevent disease and pregnancy, she said.

One aid group she approached scribbled her information on a piece of paper and told her to return later to speak with a social worker. When she did, they said they were busy. After 72 hours, she assumed it was pointless. Weeks later, she found she was pregnant.

IsraAID found her while doing door-to-door visits in her area. At first, she was afraid to let them put her information into their phone, worried it would be broadcast on social media. But she felt more comfortable knowing the phones were not personal devices, thinking she could hold the organisation accountable if there were problems.

She's one of tens of thousands of people still living in displacement sites in the capital, Juba, despite a peace deal ending civil war in 2018. Some are afraid to leave or have no homes to return to.

Technology isn't widely used by aid groups focused on gender-based violence in South Sudan. Some organizations say that, based on survivors' feedback, the ideal app would allow people to get help remotely.

Stigma surrounding sexual assault further complicates efforts to get help in South Sudan. It's especially hard for young girls who need to get permission to leave their homes, said Mercy Lwambi, gender-based violence lead at the International Rescue Committee.

"They want to talk to someone faster than a physical meeting," she said.

But South Sudan has one of the lowest rates of mobile access and connectivity in the world, with less than 25 per cent of market penetration, according to a report by GSMA, a global network of mobile operators. People with phones don't always have internet access, and many are illiterate.

"You have to be thinking, will this work in a low-tech environment? What are the literacy rates? Do they have access to devices? If so, what kind? Will they find it engaging, will they trust it, is it safe?" said Kirsten Pontalti, a senior associate at Proteknon Foundation for Innovation and Learning, an international organization focused on advancing child protection.

She said technology focused on reporting abuse should include an audio component for people with low literacy and be as low-tech as possible.

One 45-year-old man, a father of 11, said it took years to seek help after being raped by his wife after he refused to have sex and said he didn't want more children.

It took multiple visits by aid workers to his displacement site in Juba before he felt comfortable speaking out. "Organisations need to engage more with the community," he said. "If they hadn't shown up, I wouldn't have come in." —*PTI*

South Sudan has one of the lowest rates of mobile access and connectivity in the world ***PHOTO: PTI***

# *What can be done to achieve permanent peace in Manipur?*

Ethnic tensions continue to simmer in Manipur, despite efforts by the Centre to stabilize the restive region that has been beset by ethnic violence for nearly two years.

In May 2023, long-standing grievances between the Meitei and Kuki communities erupted into violence, which has so far claimed over 250 lives and displaced more than 50,000. The majority Meitei live predominantly in the state's Imphal valley, while the Kuki populate the surrounding hill regions.

The violence started after the Meiteis demanded official tribal status, which bestows privileges such as job quotas and land rights. The Kuki fear they will be further marginalized if the Meitei secure the tribal status.

India's federal government has split the state into two exclusive ethnic zones, separated by a buffer that central security forces patrol — a measure that reduced violence but failed to put an end to it.

As an example of continued dysfunction in Manipur, an attempt by the federal government to ensure free movement of traffic on the highways was blocked after a Kuki council said it was strongly opposed to the unrestricted free movement of goods and people in their areas.

"We will continue to oppose unrestricted free movement of people across ethnic buffer zones, as it undermines justice until our demand for a separate administration is met," a senior member of the council, told DW.

In February, the government imposed — not for the first time — "president's rule" on the restive state, a constitutional provision that takes power away from a state government in times of crisis.

The imposition of direct rule came after Chief Minister Biren Singh, a Meitei from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), resigned after failing to resolve the conflict.

However, the promise of peace that came with the federal government's direct control over Manipur remains elusive.

While the violence has been kept mostly under control, there is consensus among observers that lasting peace hinges on sustained neutral mediation involving representatives from both the Meitei and Kuki communities, as well as from Naga groups, who also share the state's hill regions.

"The problem can only be resolved by adopting fairness and impartiality in the peace process, which the government seems to deliberately overlook," Janghaolun Haokip, a social activist, told DW. "Unless there are equitable resource-sharing or federal arrangements, the problem will not go away and will complicate reconciliation. The problem also lies in the government's indifferent approach towards the rights and privileges of minorities."

Some experts believe that the prolonging the ethnic conflict in Manipur helps politicians consolidate power. Others point to the parallels between the state and Myanmar ***PHOTO: PTI***

In a recent report, the International Crisis Group, an independent non-profit, said that finding a sustainable way out of the crisis would require addressing the root causes of ethnic tensions.

"Unable to bring the unrest under control, the Central government has informally partitioned the state, with security forces patrolling the buffer zone separating the two groups," the report said.

"This delay in addressing the stalemate has allowed the state's militant groups, which had been facing terminal decline, to come back stronger. If not addressed soon, the Manipur conflict could rumble on, deepening the state's ethnic divide and causing a dangerous ripple effect in neighbouring states," it added.

According to various estimates published in Indian media, militant factions in Imphal have amassed a vast array of stolen weapons, including over 6,000 firearms and ammunition rounds looted from police armories since 2023. Just a fraction has been returned.

Pradip Phanjoubam, editor of the Imphal Review of Arts and Politics, who has been chronicling events since the conflict broke out, believes that various parties with vested interests are benefitting from the conflict continuing.

"Populist leaders built their constituencies through sectarian and selfishly divisive politics, and now do not know how to beat the conflict trap," Phanjoubam told DW.

He suggested that by continuing the conflict, warring sides might preserve their leverage to secure gains, especially if they believed a resolution favoring peace could dilute their claims or bargaining power.

"Economic gain, political power and resource control can perpetuate conflicts. And this is what is happening," he said.

Political scientist Bidhan Laishram agreed but also noted that Myanmar's conflict, just across the border from Manipur, has complicated the situation further by driving irregular immigration, as well as drug and arms smuggling into the region.

"The fast-evolving dynamics and equations in Myanmar and the geo-strategic interests is exacerbating the ethnic crisis in Manipur," he told DW.

Manipur's political instability has always been tied to Myanmar due to the kinship ties that span the porous frontier, but the impact has been particularly visible over the past year.

"The prolonged crisis in Manipur is a result of geopolitical calculations, state inaction, and the unchecked expansion of insurgent networks. Without a shift in policy and enforcement mechanisms, the situation is likely to deteriorate further," Khuraijam Athouba, spokesperson for the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity, told DW.

"Despite overwhelming evidence of cross-border infiltration and drug cartel involvement, the government has failed to take decisive," he added. —*DW News*

# US air strikes killed 31 in Yemen, say Houthi rebels

## Trump warns Iran against using the rebels as its proxy

**WEST PALM BEACH, 16 MARCH**

The Houthi rebel-run Health Ministry says the death toll from US strikes on Yemen has climbed to 31, including women and children.

Anees al-Asbahi, a spokesperson for the ministry, said on Sunday that another 101 people were wounded in the overnight strikes in the capital of Sanaa and the northern province of Saada.

President Donald Trump said he ordered a series of airstrikes on the Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Saturday, promising to use "overwhelming lethal force" until Iranian-backed Houthi rebels cease their attacks on shipping along a vital maritime corridor. The Houthis said at least 18 civilians were killed.

"Our brave Warfighters are right now carrying out aerial attacks on the terrorists' bases, leaders, and missile defences to protect American shipping, air, and naval assets, and to restore Navigational Freedom," Trump said in a social media post.

"No terrorist force will stop American commercial and naval vessels from freely sailing the Waterways of the World."

He also warned Iran to stop supporting the rebel group, promising to hold the country "fully accountable" for the actions of its proxy. It comes two weeks after the US leader sent a letter to Iranian leaders offering a path to restarting bilateral talks between the countries on Iran's advancing nuclear programme.

Trump has said he will not allow it to become operational.

This video grab taken from a footage shared by the US Navy, showing a jet taking off from a carrier at an undisclosed location before the airstrikes in Sanaa, Yemen, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

### IRAN REJECTS CLAIM

Meanwhile, Gen. Hossein Salami, head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, on Sunday denied his country was involved in the Houthis' attacks, saying it "plays no role in setting the national or operational policies" of the militant groups it is allied with across the region, reported state-run TV. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, in a post on X, urged the US to halt the strikes and said Washington cannot dictate Iran's foreign policy. *—PTI*

## Roadside bomb kills 5 security men in Pakistan

**QUETTA, 16 MARCH**

A roadside bomb exploded near a bus carrying security forces in restive southwestern Pakistan on Sunday, killing at least five officers and wounding 10 others, police said. The attack occurred in Naushki, a district in Balochistan, said Zafar Zamanani, a local police chief. He said the the blast also badly damaged another nearby bus. The dead and wounded were transported to a nearby hospital. Sarfraz Bugti, the chief minister of Balochistan, condemned the attack. No one immediately claimed responsibility, but suspicion is likely to fall on the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army, which has been demanding independence. A few days ago they ambushed a train and killed 26 hostages before security forces struck back, killing the 33 attackers. *—PTI*

## 16 killed as bomb from Syria's 13-yr conflict explodes

**DAMASCUS, 16 MARCH**

Ordnance from Syria's 13-year conflict exploded in the coastal city of Lattakia, collapsing a building and killing more than a dozen people, the Syrian Civil Defence said Sunday. The paramedic group, known as the White Helmets, said it worked overnight, searching through debris and recovered 16 bodies, including five women and five children, and that 18 others were injured. The group and residents said the explosion occurred in a metal scrap storage space on the ground floor of the four-story building. The United Nations said in February that since the ouster of Bashar Assad in December, over 1,400 unexploded devices across Syria have been safely disposed of and 138 minefields and contaminated areas identified in Idleb, Aleppo, Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Lattakia. *—AP*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

## Pope to miss Angelus delivery for 5th Sunday

**ROME, 16 MARCH**

Pope Francis continues his recovery from double pneumonia at Rome's Gemelli hospital with the Vatican expected to issue the traditional Sunday Angelus prayer as a written text for the fifth straight week. The pope typically delivers the Angelus from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square to the gathered faithful, who have grown more numerous due to the Jubilee year that Francis inaugurated in December. Along with a stop at St. Peter's to seek indulgences by walking through the basilica's Holy Door, pilgrims are now also adding a stop at Gemelli, a 15-minute train ride from the Vatican. Doctors said while the pope's condition is stable, he still requires hospitalization for both physical and respiratory therapy. *—PTI*

## China completes second submarine for ally Pakistan

**TAIPEI, 16 MARCH**

A Chinese shipyard has completed a second submarine for the Pakistan navy, further strengthening military ties between the two countries. The diesel-electric Hangor class craft equipped with torpedoes and anti-ship missiles was launched on Thursday at China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation's shipworks in the central city of Wuhan on the Yangtze River, Chinese state media reported Sunday. Pakistan which has used submarines in the past to confront India, contracted to buy eight submarines, the final four of which are to be built by the Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works in the Pakistani port city of the same name. *—PTI*

**EN MASSE, AGAINST GRAFT**

Tens of thousands gathered in Belgrade on Saturday for a mass rally against Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, marking the peak of months-long protests sparked by a deadly train station collapse. Students, leading the anti-corruption movement, called for justice and accountability for the victims. Despite occasional clashes with police, the rally, dubbed '15 for 15', became the largest demonstration in Serbia's history **PHOTO: PTI**

# Nightclub fire kills 59 in N Macedonia

**SKOPJE, 16 MARCH**

A massive nightclub fire killed 59 people early on Sunday in North Macedonia's eastern town of Kocani, and injured about 155 more, Interior Minister Panche Toshkovski said.

He said 39 of the dead had so far been identified.

The blaze broke out at 2.35am during a concert, Toshkovski said, adding that the use of pyrotechnics triggered the fire.

Videos showed young people running through the smoke as the musicians urged people to escape as quickly as possible.

This is the worst tragedy in recent memory to befall the landlocked nation, whose population is less than 2M.

"This is a difficult and very sad day for Macedonia. The loss of so many young lives is irreparable, and the pain of the families, loved ones and friends is immeasurable," Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski wrote on X. "The people and the government will do everything in their power to help them in these most difficult moments."

Officials said many of the injured suffered severe burns. They are being assisted by volunteer organisations. Family members gathered in front of hospitals and Kocani's city offices, begging authorities for more information. *—PTI*

The blaze broke out at 2.35am during a concert at the club **PHOTO: X**

**18TH-CENTURY LAW**

# Judge stops Trump from deportation drive under old law

**WASHINGTON, 16 MARCH**

PHOTO: PTI

A federal judge on Saturday barred the administration of President Donald Trump from deportations under an 18th-century law that Trump invoked just hours earlier asserting the United States was being invaded by a Venezuelan gang and that he had new powers to remove its members from the country.

James E Boasberg, chief judge for the US District Court for the District of Columbia, said he needed to issue his order immediately because the government was already flying migrants it claimed were newly deportable under Trump's proclamation to El Salvador and Honduras to be incarcerated there. El Salvador already agreed this week to take up to 300 migrants that the Trump administration designated as gang members.

"I do not believe I can wait any longer and am required to act," Boasberg said during a Saturday evening hearing in a lawsuit brought by the ACLU and Democracy Forward. "A brief delay in their removal does not cause the government any harm," he added, noting they remain in government custody but ordering that any planes in the air be turned around.

The ruling came hours after Trump claimed the Venezuelan gang, Tren de Aragua, was invading the United States and invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a sweeping wartime authority used only three times in US history that allows the president broader leeway on policy and executive action to speed up mass deportations.

Trump's administration had entered into an agreement with El Salvador under which it will pay the country USD 6 million to imprison for one year about 300 alleged members of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang, in one of the first instances of the Central American country taking migrants from the United States. The agreement however has been put on hold by the US district Court. *—PTI*

## Trump cuts staff at VoA, other govt-run media

**WASHINGTON, 16 MARCH**

The Trump administration on Saturday began making deep cuts to Voice of America and other government-run, pro-democracy programming, with the organisation's director saying all VOA employees have been put on leave.

The move to send 1300 journalists and other staff on leave came after Trump ordered a reduction in operations at agencies under US Agency for Global media, after Congress passed its latest funding bill. The move has sparked backlash from press advocacy groups. *—PTI*

# 32 dead as tornadoes rip though parts of US

**OKLAHOMA, 16 MARCH**

Violent tornadoes ripped through parts of the US, wiping out schools and toppling semi-tractor trailers in several states, part of a monster storm that has killed at least 32 people on Saturday.

The number of fatalities increased after the Kansas Highway Patrol reported eight people died in a highway pileup caused by a dust storm in Sherman County on Friday. At least 50 vehicles were involved.

Officials in Arkansas said three people died in Independence County and 29 injured across eight counties as storms passed through the state. "We've teams out, surveying the damage from last night's tornadoes and have first responders on the ground to assist," Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders said on X.

She and Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp declared states of emergency. Kemp said he was making the declaration in anticipation of severe weather moving in later Saturday.

In Mississippi, Gov. Tate Reeves announced that six people died in three counties and three more people were missing. *—PTI*

A vehicle sits in front of a destroyed home and debris from a severe storm in Wayne County on Saturday **PHOTO: AP/PTI**

**ZERO-GRAVITY EFFECTS**

# *Dizziness, nausea to greet astronauts on return to earth*

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

While watching astronauts float within the International Space Station (ISS) can be a spectacle, the absence of gravity takes its toll on long-duration space travellers. Upon their return to Earth, astronauts frequently experience dizziness, nausea, and difficulty with balance.

NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, along with Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, are scheduled to return to Earth on Wednesday aboard SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft. For Williams and Wilmore, their originally planned eight-day mission had to be extended to over nine months due to a series of helium leaks and thruster failures, which rendered their spacecraft unsafe for operation. As a consequence, it returned empty in September.

Former astronauts have often reported a range of physical challenges after space missions, including trouble with walking, vision problems, dizziness, and a curious condition referred to as "baby feet." This occurs when the thick layer of skin on the soles of their feet softens and becomes almost delicate like that of a baby due to the prolonged exposure to a weightless environment.

Upon returning, astronauts must readjust quickly to Earth's gravity, which can lead to issues with standing, stabilising their gaze, walking, and turning. To ensure their safety, returning astronauts are typically seated in a chair immediately after landing, as highlighted by the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, which studies body changes in space.

NASA video grab shows Butch Wilmore (left), Sunita Williams and other astronauts greet each other after the SpaceX capsule docked with the International Space Station **PHOTO: PTI**

It can take several weeks for astronauts to recalibrate to life on Earth. The vestibular organ, located deep within the ear, plays a crucial role in maintaining balance by sending information about gravity to the brain. In the microgravity of space, this information is altered, potentially leading to "space sickness." Subsequently, returning to Earth can trigger what is sometimes termed "gravity sickness," exhibiting symptoms that mirror those of space sickness.

On Earth, gravity causes blood and body fluids to pool in the lower part of the body; however, in space, these fluids tend to accumulate in the upper body, resulting in a bloated appearance. Upon returning, astronauts often encounter orthostatic hypotension—dizziness when standing up—due to the stronger gravitational pull on Earth, which makes it more challenging to circulate blood from the heart to the brain.

Furthermore, the lack of gravitational forces leads to significant bone density loss, with NASA estimating that astronauts can lose approximately one per cent of bone density for every month spent in space if no precautions are taken. To address this issue, astronauts on the ISS adhere to a strict exercise routine, spending two hours each day on the treadmill or stationary bicycle. Without this regimen, they would likely struggle to walk or stand upon their return after months of weightlessness.

Additionally, astronauts may encounter a heightened vulnerability to infections and illnesses due to a compromised immune system. European Space Agency flight surgeon Sergi Vaquer explained that while immune cells exhibit altered behaviour in space, there has yet to be any record of severe infections aboard the Space Station, suggesting that this cellular behaviour does not necessarily correlate with reduced immune protection. *—PTI*

## Google set to replace Assistant with Gemini

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Google has announced plans to phase out Google Assistant, replacing it with Gemini on Android phones by late 2025. Users will receive advance notice before the transition, with upgrade prompts rolling out in the coming months. "Nearly a decade later, we're in the midst of another platform shift—this time, generative AI is transforming how we interact with technology," Google stated. Older devices running Android 9 or earlier, or with less than 2GB RAM, will retain the existing Assistant experience. Meanwhile, newer Android models, including Pixel, Samsung, OnePlus, and Motorola, have already made Gemini the default assistant, with millions of users having switched. Google confirmed that by the end of the year, Google Assistant will no longer be accessible on most mobile devices or available for download. Additionally, Gemini will introduce Astra-powered video and screen-sharing capabilities this month. *—Agencies*

## SAIL to expand Rourkela plant to 9MT by 2030

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

State-owned SAIL has plans to more than double the capacity of its Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) to around 9 million tonne per annum at an investment of Rs 30,000 crore, a move which will boost supplies to sectors like defence, oil & gas, automobiles among others. vPost expansion, which will come up over an area of 1,200 acre, RSP will alone contribute around 25 per cent to SAIL's overall 35 million tonne per annum (MTPA) production capacity target by 2030, Alok Verma, Director In-Charge, RSP told PTI in an interview. Located at Rourkela in Odisha, around 320 km from state capital Bhubaneswar, RSP holds the distinction of being the first public sector steel plant in India. It was set up in 1950s with German collaboration with an initial capacity of 1 MT. *—PTI*

## Allchem Lifescience files IPO papers, seeks ₹190cr

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Drug manufacturer Allchem Lifescience has submitted preliminary documents to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for an initial public offering (IPO) aimed at raising up to Rs 190 crore. This Gujarat-based company plans to issue new equity shares worth Rs 130 crore, with an additional 71.55 lakh shares available through an offer for sale by promoters Kantilal Ramanlal Patel and Manisha Bipin Patel. Currently, the promoters hold a 100 per cent stake in the firm. Founded in 2017, Allchem Lifescience produces active pharmaceutical ingredients and speciality chemicals. The company has reported robust financial growth, with a revenue increase of 12.75 per cent CAGR between FY22 and FY24, and a profit after tax growth of 28.65 per cent in the same period. Emkay Global Financial Services is managing the IPO. *—PTI*

## Regulators must address AI's collusion risks: CCI

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Ravneet Kaur, Chairperson of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), highlighted artificial intelligence (AI) as a transformative force in contemporary markets, while cautioning that it may also facilitate collusion, including algorithmic discrimination masquerading as dynamic pricing. Speaking at the 10th National Conference on the Economics of Competition Law, Kaur stressed the importance of adopting trust-based regulations to mitigate these risks. AI influences pricing strategies but the CCI is investigating its impact on competition. Since the introduction of the Competition Act in 2002, the CCI has handled over 1,300 antitrust cases, with 1,180 resolved. *—PTI*

# Silver to outperform gold as demand hits record highs

### Silver to gain 23% in a year, outpacing gold's 17% rise

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Prices of silver are anitcipated to outpace that of gold, driven by supply deficits and growing industrial demand, which are expected to act as strong tailwinds for the metal's value, according to the global investment firm WisdomTree.

"We anticipate that silver will outpace gold, gaining 23 per cent over the coming year compared to gold's projected 17 per cent increase (Q4 2024 to Q4 2025)," the report added.

"We remain optimistic about its potential, with supply deficits and increasing industrial demand acting as strong tailwinds," the report said, answering the question on whether the fortunes of silver is set to change in 2025.

According to the report, there has been a shortage of supply for silver for four years in a row, and 2025 will probably be the fifth.

Above-ground inventory is depleted by deficits, and even while there is still plenty of inventory, investors hold a large portion of it and demand higher prices to encourage sales.

There has been a shortage of supply for silver for four years in a row, and 2025 will probably be the fifth **PHOTO: PTI**

Industrial demand for silver has reached record highs, driven by increasing usage in photovoltaic (solar panel) applications, 5G technology, and automotive electronics. Photovoltaic installations are expected to set another record in 2025, further boosting silver demand, the report added.

Beyond renewable energy, the expansion of data centres and artificial intelligence applications in 2025 is set to further increase silver demand. In the automotive industry, the growing use of electronic components and investment in battery-charging infrastructure will continue to support silver consumption, the report added.

- Until mid-December 2024, silver was on track to outperform gold. However, a sudden contraction in the final two weeks of the year allowed gold to overtake silver, closing the year up 27 per cent, while silver finished with a 21 per cent gain

Until mid-December 2024, silver was on track to outperform gold.

However, a sudden contraction in the final two weeks of the year allowed gold to overtake silver, closing the year up 27 per cent, while silver finished with a 21 per cent gain.

Silver has been undervalued, relative to gold, with the gold-to-silver ratio surpassing 90 in January 2025 before beginning to decline.The price of silver per kilogram has reached the level of RS 1,03,000 in India. *—ANI*

# FPIs pull ₹30K cr from equities in early March

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

PHOTO: X

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have continued their sell-off in the Indian equity market, withdrawing over Rs 30,000 crore in the first fortnight of March amidst escalating global trade tensions. This follows significant outflows of Rs 34,574 crore in February and Rs 78,027 crore in January, bringing total withdrawals for 2025 to Rs 1.42 lakh crore according to data from depositories.

The data reveals that FPIs offloaded shares worth Rs 30,015 crore from Indian equities by 13 March, marking the 14th consecutive week of net outflows. The persistent selling pressure is attributed to a combination of global and domestic factors, particularly the uncertainty surrounding US trade policies under President Donald Trump. This uncertainty raises concerns over a potential recession driven by tariffs, which has made FPIs cautious towards India.

Elevated US bond yields and a strong dollar have made American assets increasingly attractive. The depreciation of the Indian rupee has further exacerbated the situation, reducing returns for foreign investors.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, noted that FPI outflows are significantly moving towards Chinese stocks, which are currently outperforming other markets. The overall trend indicates a significant pullback in investments in Indian equities, which saw a sharp contrast with remarkable inflows of Rs 1.71 lakh crore in 2023, driven by optimism regarding India's economic fundamentals. In 2024, however, net inflows dwindled to just Rs 427 crore. *—PTI*

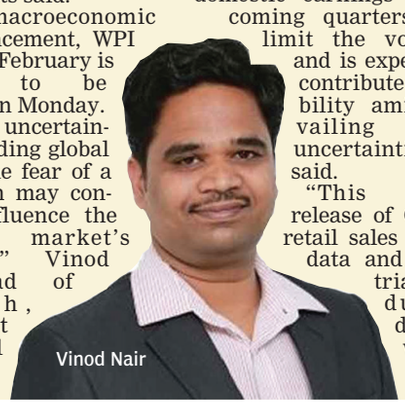
# US Fed rate decision, tariffs to steer markets this week

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

The US Fed interest rate decision, global trends, tariff-related developments and trading activity of foreign investors will drive the equity market movement this week, analysts said.

Among macroeconomic data announcement, WPI inflation for February is scheduled to be announced on Monday.

"Persistent uncertainties surrounding global trade and the fear of a US recession may continue to influence the domestic market's momentum," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.


Vinod Nair

However, the moderation in valuations following recent corrections, along with supportive factors such as falling crude oil prices, an easing dollar index, and expectations of a rebound in domestic earnings in the coming quarters, may limit the volatility and is expected to contribute to stability amid prevailing trade uncertainties, he said.

"This week's release of China's retail sales growth data and industrial production data will provide a clearer understanding of the Chinese economic growth outlook," Nair said.

Investors will also be closely monitoring US retail sales and production numbers, he added. Among other global events, the BoE (Bank of England) interest rate decision will also be tracked.

Escalation in global trade tensions and the US recession worries significantly weighed on investor sentiment last week. "This week, we expect the market to remain range-bound with some volatility and sector rotation, driven by global market trends and ongoing developments in the US tariff policies," Siddhartha Khemka, Head-Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said. *—PTI*

**INFOSYS, TCS HIT HARD**

# Mcap of five of top-10 most valued firms declines ₹93K cr

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

The combined market capitalisation (Mcap) of five of the top-10 most valued firms declined by Rs 93,357.52 crore, with IT giants Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services taking the biggest hit, in line with a weak trend in domestic equities.

Last week, the BSE Sensex benchmark declined 503.67 points or 0.68 per cent, and the NSE Nifty fell 155.3 points or 0.69 per cent.

Meanwhile, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries saw a decline in their market valuations.

In contrast, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, ITC, Bajaj Finance and Bharti Airtel posted gains. The five firms together added Rs 49,833.62 crore in their market capitalisation. Mcap of Infosys dropped by Rs 44,226.62 crore to Rs 6,55,820.48 crore.

PHOTO: X

TCS' valuation tumbled by Rs 35,800.98 crore to Rs 12,70,798.97 crore and slipped to the third place among the country's 10-most valuable companies chart.

Hindustan Unilever's market valuation depreciated by Rs 6,567.11 crore to Rs 5,11,235.81 crore.

State Bank of India's Mcap decreased by Rs 4,462.31 crore to Rs 6,49,489.22 crore, and that of Reliance Industries' went lower by Rs 2,300.50 crore, taking its market capitalisation to Rs 16,88,028.20 crore.

The market valuation of HDFC Bank jumped by Rs 12,591.60 crore and ITC added Rs 10,073.34 crore in its Mcap to Rs 5,15,366.68 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued company, followed by HDFC Bank, TCS, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, ITC, and Hindustan Unilever. *—PTI*

# Sun Pharma, Zydus recall products in US: USFDA

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Sun Pharma and Zydus Pharmaceuticals are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, according to the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA).

The New Jersey-based Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Inc is recalling 9,840 bottles of Morphine Sulfate extended-release tablets for "Failed Dissolution Specifications", the US health regulator stated in its latest Enforcement Report. The company initiated the Class II nationwide (US) recall on February 6, 2025.

USFDA stated that Zydus Pharmaceuticals (USA) Inc is recalling a lot of Nelarabine Injection, used in the treatment of certain cancers, in the US. The company is recalling 36,978 vials of Nelarabine Injection in strength of 250mg/50mL, (5mg/mL) for "Failed Impurities/ Degradation Specifications," USFDA stated. The company initiated the Class II recall in February.

Zydus is also recalling 1,893 vials of the drug in strength of 250mg/50mL, (5mg/mL).

The company initiated the Class II nationwide recall on 13 February this year.

As per the USFDA, a Class II recall is initiated in a situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote. Indian pharmaceutical companies supply a substantial proportion of drugs to US residents, with four out of ten of all prescriptions filled in the US in 2022 being supplied by Indian companies.

As per industry estimates, overall, medicines from Indian companies provided USD 219 billion in savings to the US healthcare system in 2022 and a total of USD 1.3 trillion between 2013 and 2022.

Generics from Indian companies are expected to generate an additional USD 1.3 trillion in savings over the next five years. *—PTI*

# Housing prices to grow more than inflation rate this year: CREDAI

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Housing demand continues to be strong and is expected to grow further on the back of tax incentives offered in the Budget and a recent repo rate cut, CREDAI President Boman Irani said.

CREDAI is an apex body for private real estate developers.

In an interview with PTI, Irani asserted that there are no signs of demand slowdown in the Indian housing market, rather it will continue to rise in the long-term horizon.

However, he said there could be an impact in some markets that are "over-heated" but overall at pan-India level there are no concerns at all on the growth going up only. Short-term blips in a real estate cycle is not something that we need to worry about. We need to see long-term growth," he told PTI in Nashik, where CREDAI recently organised its two-day conference.

- Irani said the tax incentives offered in Budget and a recent 25 basis points reduction in repo rate would improve housing demand. He said government has been focusing on infrastructure and this is creating new opportunities for all segments

Irani said the tax incentives offered in Budget and a recent 25 basis points reduction in repo rate would improve housing demand. Irani said government has been focusing a lot on infrastructure and this is creating new business opportunities for all segments of the real estate sector including housing, office, malls and warehousing. *—PTI*

## TARIFF UNCERTAINTY MAY DELAY US INVESTMENTS: TATA

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

Decisions to invest in the US are likely to be delayed due to lack of clarity over tariff policy under President Donald Trump's new administration, according to Tata Technologies CEO & MD Warren Harris.

The company, a global product engineering and digital services firm with significant presence in the US, however, is hopeful that in the next month or two, there will be some clarity in terms of policy, Harris told PTI from Detroit.

"We are very bullish, medium to long term in North America. The lack of clarity on things like tariffs are not helpful. They're not helpful to our customers, and because they're not helpful to our customers, investment decisions are likely to be delayed," he said.

Harris was responding to a query on the impact of Trump's tariff war against various countries. *—PTI*

**RISE OF QUICK COMMERCE**

# *Essential goods sales drop 52% in urban areas*

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

A significant decline in the sale of food, beverages, and confectionery in urban areas has been attributed to the rise of quick commerce, according to a report by global consulting firm PwC. The report reveals that 52 per cent of physical store retailers have reported experiencing reduced sales due to the impact of these rapid delivery services.

The downturn is not limited to food, with 47 per cent of personal care products and 33 per cent of household cleaning items also seeing considerable sales reductions. This trend indicates that quick-delivery models are more disruptive for frequently purchased consumer goods.

47 per cent of personal care products and 33 per cent of household cleaning items also seeing considerable sales reductions **PHOTO: X**

Quick commerce, or q-commerce, refers to e-commerce services that deliver orders within 10 to 30 minutes. Despite declines in essential product categories, niche markets such as childcare, beauty, and wellness appear to be less affected, suggesting that consumers in these sectors prefer in-store shopping for more considered purchases.

In contrast, the expansion of q-commerce in tier 2 and tier 3 cities presents a different picture. Retailers in these non-metro areas largely remain unaffected by the rise of quick commerce, primarily due to high delivery costs and inefficient inventory management caused by scattered demand. Despite quick commerce's aggressive growth in India, brick-and-mortar retail continues to thrive in smaller cities. PwC's report anticipates the Indian retail market will grow to USD 1,892 billion by 2029-30, with e-commerce projected to reach USD 220 billion, confirming that nearly 50 per cent of Indian consumers favour a hybrid model that includes both online and offline shopping. *—ANI*

# Clothing brands adapt to Gen Z's summer fashion demands

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

This summer, clothing brands in India are recalibrating their strategies to appeal to the preferences of modern consumers, particularly the Gen Z demographic. Industry leaders are embracing performance-driven fashion, influencer partnerships, limited-edition drops, and engaging digital storytelling.

Anand Aiyer, CEO of Arrow, emphasised the importance of blending comfort with sophistication, stating that their marketing approach has become more data-driven, focusing on enhancing digital outreach and in-store experiences.

Arvind Limited is reimagining linen for both work and leisure through its "Linen by Arvind" campaign.

PHOTO: X

The company is leveraging influencer collaborations to communicate the fabric's breathable and eco-friendly properties, which resonate with Gen Z's penchant for comfort and sustainability.

With inflation and economic uncertainty in mind, brands are adjusting their pricing strategies to provide value to customers. *—ANI*

## Lahiri finishes 25th, Niemann wins second title of year

**SINGAPORE, 16 MARCH**

Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri carded a two-under 69 in the third and final round to secure a modest Tied-25th finish at LIV Golf Singapore on Sunday. Lahiri, who shot rounds of 70 and 72 on the first two days, registered four birdies against two bogeys in the final round.

At the top, Joaquin Niemann (65) cruised to a massive five-shot win over Brooks Koepka (66) for his second victory in the first four events of the season. Niemann, who also won LIV Golf Adelaide in February, fired a six-under 65 in the final round to top the field at Sentosa Golf Club, outlasting Smash GC's Koepka, who finished second, and RangeGoats GC's Ben Campbell, who rounded out the podium in third. Niemann has now won four LIV Golf events in total, trailing only Koepka, who has five titles to his name. Niemann won two of the first three events in 2024 and eventually finished second in the season-long race for the Individual title.—*PTI*

## Spaun grabs lead, Bhatia is fifth with McIlroy

**PONTE VEDRA BEACH, 16 MARCH**

J.J. Spaun shot 2-under 70 as his 25-foot putt went 360 degrees around the cup and dropped for par to give him a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Players Championship. The par gave Spaun a 2-under 70, the lowest score among the final 10 groups that teed off in a strong, steady wind with gusts up to 25 mph on a course that can be intimidating even in calm conditions. Bud Cauley teed off two hours earlier and still faced a bulk of the wind. He finished with three birdies on his last four holes for a 66 to be in the final group. Lucas Glover had a 71 and finished with a double bogey on the 15th, an eagle by chipping in on the par-5 16th, and a double bogey with a tee shot that didn't reach the island on the notorious par-3 17th. Spaun was at 12-under 204, a stroke ahead of Cauley—*PTI*

## Real says it won't play again without 72 hours of rest

**MADRID, 16 MARCH**

Real Madrid won't agree to play another game without 72 hours of rest between matches. The club made the announcement, which was confirmed by coach Carlo Ancelotti, after its 2-1 win at Villarreal on Saturday. Madrid's game at Villarreal kicked off at 6:30 p.m. local time (1730 GMT) on Saturday. Madrid had played a Champions League game against Atletico Madrid on Wednesday that started at 9:00 p.m. and lasted 120 minutes plus a penalty shootout."This is the last time we will play within 72 hours," Ancelotti said before adding that the club had asked La Liga to push its game back to Sunday.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

## Dele Alli sent off 9 minutes into Como debut

**MILAN, 16 MARCH**

Dele Alli's first professional appearance in more than two years lasted just nine minutes before he was sent off. The former England international was shown a straight red card late on in Como's 2-1 loss at AC Milan on Saturday following a tackle on countryman Ruben Loftus-Cheek from behind. The 28-year-old Alli had only just come off the bench for his Como debut and his first appearance in a soccer match since last playing for Turkish club Besiktas in February 2023. Alli was initially shown a yellow card, but it was upgraded to a red after a VAR review.—*PTI*

# Norris holds off Max to win rain-hit Australian GP

## Ferrari flops in Lewis Hamilton's first race

**MELBOURNE, 16 MARCH**

McLaren's Lando Norris has won a chaotic rain-affected Australian Grand Prix, his first at Albert Park, with the Brit just managing to stay ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen following a third safety car late in Sunday's race.

Lando Norris

Lewis Hamilton had a miserable Ferrari debut. The seven-time champion finished 10th and was annoyed by constant radio messages from his pit team.

Norris started the season-opening race, Melbourne's first wet race since 2010, from pole position. But he initially came under increasing pressure from Piastri, who set a series of fastest laps until his papaya team told him to hold position. The Australian spun at the penultimate corner on lap 44 as the rain intensified and dropped down the order.

A late race fightback helped Piastri recover to take ninth place, including passing Hamilton on the final lap and gaining two championship points.

Verstappen finished 0.895 of a second behind Norris after starting from third on the grid and took advantage of Piastri's misfortune and the final safety car and tire stops. Mercedes' George Russell closed out the top-three.

"I knew I had a good pace, but I made one mistake in turn six and he got me in the DRS and the DRS around here is probably like a second or something so that allowed it to keep staying within that second," said Norris, who scored McLaren's 12th win in Australia to steal the outright record from Ferrari.

Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen

PHOTO: X

"I know what I'm capable of, I know what I can do, but it's just round one, so we need to go and do it again next weekend and then continue from there. A long season ahead, we've just got to keep our head down and keep pushing."

Williams endured a mixed bag, with Alex Albon securing his best result since Abu Dhabi 2020 and recruit Carlos Sainz, who won here last year driving for Ferrari, out at the final turn on the opening lap.

Mercedes was thrilled to get two cars in the top five, with Russell onto the podium, his first since winning in Las Vegas last year. Rookie Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who replaced Hamilton at the silver squad, showed his class with a superb fightback drive from 16th on the grid, following his Q1 exit, to finish fifth.

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll also made the best of the chaotic conditions to move up from 13th to sixth, ahead of Sauber's Nico Hülkenberg, bringing home eight points in what has been a difficult weekend for the green team, with its car uncompetitive in dry running.

Ferrari is the most successful constructor at the Australian Grand Prix, with 11 wins since its first in 1987, but it will leave Melbourne disappointed with just five points to show after Charles Leclerc finished eighth and Hamilton 10th. —*PTI*

**INDIAN WELLS FINAL**

# Draper, Rune seek breakthrough in desert

**INDIAN WELLS, 16 MARCH**

Two immensely talented players have come of age on the big stage at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden over the last ten days. Now, they'll go head-to-head in the final, as Rune and Draper will contest Sunday's men's singles final after pulling major upsets on semifinal Saturday at the BNP Paribas Open.

Rune claimed his only previous meeting with Draper, a quarterfinal tilt at last year's Cincinnati Open, 6-4, 6-2, and the 13th-ranked Dane, who won his lone Masters title in 2022 in Paris, comes into Sunday's final carrying full confidence in his game.

Draper

Rune

He's not gripping and ripping – Rune is playing a sustainable brand of tennis that can cause problems for anyone, anytime.

"I feel like I can play like this day in and day out," he said on Saturday after toppling two-time finalist Daniil Medvedev, 7-5, 6-4. "I'm not closing my eyes and hitting the lines on every shot like you can maybe do once per year. I feel like I'm building the points, mixing up the tempo, grinding, finding solutions when they're tough.

"I try to focus on what I can control, and I try to find a way to win."

Rune has upset No. 8-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas and No. 5-seeded Medvedev en route to his fourth career Masters final, but he has also rallied from a set down against France's Ugo Humbert and Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor.

That type of grit has the Dane believing that he's evolved considerably as a player and a competitor. —*PTI*

India Masters captain Sachin Tendulkar and West Indies Masters captain Brian Lara with the trophy before the final International Masters League match PHOTO: PTI

**WORLD WINTER GAMES**

# India ends Special Olympics campaign with 33 medals

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

India clinched 12 medals in four events on the final day, concluding their campaign at the Special Olympics World Winter Games with a total of 33 medals in Turin, Italy.

India's medal tally included 8 gold, 18 silver, and 7 bronze medals. In Snowshoeing, India secured four more medals, adding to the six won earlier in the competition.

Vasu Tiwari, Shalini Chauhan, and Tanya each claimed a silver medal in the 25m Snowshoeing event, while Jahangir bagged a bronze in the same category.

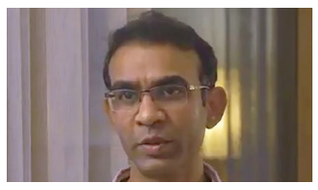
PHOTO: PTI

The Alpine Skiing segment also saw stellar performances from Indian athletes.

Radha Devi and Nirmala Devi won silver medals in the Intermediate Slalom (F01 and F04 categories, respectively), while Abhishek Kumar secured another silver in the Novice Slalom (M02 category).

Akriti demonstrated remarkable endurance in Cross Country Skiing, bagging a bronze medal in the 100m Classical Technique (F02 category). In the Floorball event, the Indian Women's Traditional Team showcased their teamwork and skill, claiming a bronze medal.

While India recorded 10 medals each in Snowshoeing and Alpine Skiing, six medals came in Snowboarding. Short Track Speed Skating, Cross Country Skiing and Floorball brought the country four—*PTI*



Nitin Patel PHOTO: PTI

## BCCI medical team head Patel quits

**NEW DELHI, 16 MARCH**

The BCCI's recently inaugurated Centre of Excellence (COE, earlier NCA) is expected to witness a few changes in composition of its staff in coming few months after Sports Science and Medical team head Nitin Patel recently tendered his resignation after a successful stint of nearly three years. While Patel was unreachable for a comment, a senior BCCI official confirmed the development to PTI that one of the senior-most staffers of NCA is indeed "moving on". "Yes, Nitin has resigned as head of the Sports Science and Medical Team. Nitin had a very good stint with BCCI, especially during this tenure, where he was instrumental in the set-up of the Sports Science and Medical team at NCA," a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity. —*PTI*

# IWL: Bala Devi's masterclass sends Sribhumi FC soaring

**BARRACKPORE, 16 MARCH**

Star Indian football team striker Bala Devi struck a hat-trick to help hosts Sribhumi FC beat Sethu FC 3-2 in the Indian Women's League here on Sunday.

The class and experience of Bala Devi were in full display as she scored in the 39th, 49th (penalty) and 65th minutes after Sethu took the lead through Hadijah Nandago in the 37th minute.

Lisham Babina Devi pulled one back for the visitors in the 88th minute, but it wasn't enough to change the course of the match at the Bibhuti Bhushan Stadium.

The two teams were locked 1-1 at half time.The win took Sribhumi FC to 12 points from eight matches and to third place in the table, while Sethu had 10 points from eight matches.In the other match played in Bhubaneswar, a second-half brace from Manisha Naik helped Nita FA secure a 2-0 victory against HOPS FC at the Capital Football Arena. Manisha (60th and 63rd) scored both her goals around the hour mark, putting the hosts in a comfortable position in a match that they dominated from the get-go.The result propelled Nita FA to the fifth spot with 10 points from eight matches.

Star Indian football team striker Bala Devi PHOTO: X / I LEAGUE

- The class and experience of Bala Devi were in full display as she scored in the 39th, 49th (penalty) and 65th minutes after Sethu took the lead through Hadijah Nandago in the 37th minute.

HOPS, meanwhile, languished at the bottom with a solitary point.Nita FA's veteran midfielder Kamala Devi had one of her finest performances this season, as she completely dictated the proceedings from the middle. She was the vital cog in their machinery that allowed the hosts to dictate terms against the side from Delhi. —*PTI*

# NZ beat Pakistan by 9 wickets in the 1st T20I

**CHRISTCHURCH, 16 MARCH**

A new era for Pakistan white ball cricket got off to a rough start Sunday with a nine wicket loss to New Zealand in the first of five Twenty20 internationals.

First-time captain Salman Ali Agha led a new look team into the match, which followed Pakistan's poor performance at home in the 50-overs Champions Trophy and began its buildup to the 2026 T20 World Cup.

The Pakistan batting crumbled against the New Zealand pace attack, and the tourists were all out for 91 in 18.4 overs, its fifth-lowest total in T20 internationals.

New Zealand easily ran down that total, reaching 92-1 from 10.1 overs with Tim Seifert making 44 from 29 balls and Finn Allen 29 from 17. Tim Robinson was 18, not out, and took two runs from the first ball of the 11th over to complete the win.

PHOTO: X

"It was difficult and we weren't up to the mark," Ali Agha said. "They bowled well. They were bowling in the right areas, and there was swing and seam for them as well.

"But out batting wasn't up to the mark. We have won the day before the next game, and we will try to gather ourselves and be better in the next game."

The second match is in Dunedin, New Zealand, on Tuesday. —*PTI*

**AMID BCCI ORDER**

# *Don't want to be alone: Kohli bats for family on tours*

**BENGALURU, 16 MARCH**

Star batter Virat Kohli supported the presence of players' families on tours, saying he would always prefer having personal support around him to deal with tough and intense days on the field instead of sulking alone in his hotel room.

A BCCI directive which was issued after India's 1-3 Test series defeat against Australia had curtailed the family time of players for no longer than 14 days on tours exceeding 45 days.

The wife, children, or girlfriends of players could be with them for a maximum of one week on shorter tours.

Kohli, Ravindra Jadeja and Mohammed Shami had their families in Dubai during the recently-concluded Champions Trophy but they did not stay at the team hotel. The expense of the families' stay was borne by the players and not the BCCI.

"The role of family is very difficult to explain to people...how grounding it is to just come back to your family every time you have something intense, which happens on the outside," said Kohli during RCB's Innovation Lab summit, which concluded here on Saturday.

"I don't think people have an understanding of what value it brings."

Kohli said having the family around would help a player to recover from on-field disappointments much quicker.

"I don't want to go to my room and just sit alone and sulk. I want to be able to be normal. Then, you can treat your game as something that is a responsibility.

"Not in a vague sense, but in a very real way that you finish your commitment and then you come back to your house, you're with family, and absolutely normalcy in your house and normal family life goes on.

"So, for me, that is a day of immense pleasure. I won't miss any opportunities to go out and spend time with my family whenever I can," said Kohli. —*PTI*

# Avani shoots 65 to finish Tied-13th in Australia

**COFFS HARBOUR, 16 MARCH**

Avani Prashanth shot a superb 5-under 65 in the final round of the Australian Women's Classic and registered a solid top-15 finish in her maiden season on the Ladies European Tour.

With earlier rounds of 72-70, she totalled 3-under 207 and finished six shots behind the winner, Manon De Roey, who birdied the final hole to pip Cara Gainer to the title.

Pranavi Urs, who was the other Indian to cut shot 72 and ended at T-65. Diksha Dagar had missed the cut. Avani started on the tenth and birdied the 10th, 12th, 14th, 17th and 18th.

**Spaun grabs lead, Bhatia is fifth with McIlroy**

J.J. Spaun shot 2-under 70 as his 25-foot putt went 360 degrees around the cup and dropped for par to give him a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Players Championship. The par gave Spaun a 2-under 70, the lowest score among the final 10 groups that teed off in a strong, steady wind with gusts up to 25 mph on a course that can be intimidating even in calm conditions. —*PTI*